

# CutBank

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Fall 1977

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# CutBank 9







# CutBank

Fall/Winter 1977

Editors: Lex Runciman, Rick Robbins, and Art Homer

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The editors are pleased to note that  
two stories published recently in  
*CutBank*—

“The Recycled Woman” by Madeline DeFrees  
and

“Mozart in the Afternoon” by Sara Vogan  
—were listed as

“Distinctive” in Martha Foley’s *Best  
Short Stories of 1977*.



## HOLDING YOU

*for Danielle*

This Fall the frost snapped early  
and for your fourth year  
the almond flowers will not be back  
nor the starlings who built nests.  
Even if I were with you  
I'm not sure I could explain.  
It is like the day  
a bird came in the open window;  
I put him in your hands  
and for a moment he did not stir.

Here, the leaves slide up the wind. . .  
Sister Caritas prepared me for 1st Communion,  
the Host would bleed if bitten or touched—  
it was thin as a leaf or flower  
pressed dry in an almanac.  
I was 16 when a blade of grass fluttered  
along my forearm, then a girl's finger. . .  
Whatever we take to heart  
slips sharp and neat beneath the ribs—  
your mother put her fingers inside my chest  
and shook me out like a dry sack of leaves.

The cottonwoods are a bare twist of branches.  
A bruise-red leaf of the Chinese maple  
blows over my shoulder—the wind swirls  
small tides of dust, and this is as much  
embrace as words will make.



**SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS,  
CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

*on a photograph by Lin Romero*

It has been some time  
since they reapportioned saints—  
this child of ten despairs  
knows nothing of that  
or eternal Rome where they cut  
St. Christopher adrift.  
She knows lime and sandstone  
houses once held on hope  
and weathered chubascos busting  
loose from Golfo Tehuantepec  
in his mis-blessed name.  
Centuries of amulets and  
holy mentions, some safety  
from the hundred hazards  
and hurt ends in a road  
are now so many wings torn  
from bees in a wind storm.

The walls rain dust, cough chalk,  
a thousand minute shells  
blowing nowhere with the sand.  
He shouldered children over  
a river's swollen heart,  
through small or chicken pox,  
with the medallions scarred  
across their skin, but living;  
and for a while he held off  
the blank clouds of poverty  
from entering their eyes—  
bore the world's weight  
and held each beam in place.

But now her eyes lift  
to where the dust drifts off;  
it's as good a place as any  
to find relief. A small mirror  
aimlessly in one hand,  
she is tired of what it reflects—  
the other bunches back  
her crow-black hair—the ancient  
attitude of last questions,  
“What becomes of it all?”  
A dog watches with her.  
Stone-white flames of eyes,  
twin streaks below the chest,  
recall a totem of the Mayas—  
their gods must have also aged  
and likewise left them  
with the stopped tongues of relics.

What of a patron who had  
a staff, and a back of muscles  
coiled like mountains,  
now a shadow chased around  
the fallen corner of home?  
Faith dies in a slight  
remembrance, an image  
in someone's forgotten name,  
prayers repeated into clouds.  
Something in this photograph  
and the dog that licks and guards  
by this child's bare feet,  
will save her before the medal  
hung for years around my neck.

## LAKE COUNTY ELEGY

The creek loops the town  
with a splay of stone —  
each year's melt gouging a new bed  
& shrinking to a thread of scum.  
Bull pine & scrub oak — I walk  
bluff-backed to the wind,  
long-armed to water & the granite  
grained smooth like skin.

Turning old faces  
I look for the cut of water —  
the year the boom failed,  
a marriage dried onto the rocks  
cold sheets, stiff back, or  
the promise that keeps me coming back  
like a 78 with a divot, the skip, the skip  
Caruso of the static  
singing arias to the days of full houses & cooking smells,  
a child's pride in a dream of when the mines  
were worked, the houses built,  
the wagon trip west.

The Mirabel's timbered mouth  
gapes like a rusted can  
& the blood  
thinned in the hard thirties  
curdles as the myths  
trickle like rust from a junked car,  
the mottled skin of the old  
pocking so thin  
the wind blows through.



God! how many points of stone  
plot our turnings — more  
our being turned — the tumble  
& slide honing the curve of granite  
a flash of mica  
& the glint like eyes & gone.

**F.S.A.  
DOCUMENTARY PHOTOS OF THE THIRTIES**

Light burns an instant  
through the lens  
as the shutter blades cut  
& the salts steam recognition —  
glass plate like a leaf of grass  
processing toward the harvest  
of ash, the feast  
of gray light  
& two dimensional flesh.

I look through these images  
like some fat-bodied sybil,  
some new-styled Ma Joad  
hunched by the woodstove in a black dress,  
one gray lit burner  
like an eye propped open by a thick iron finger.  
One by one she burns the family relics —  
the post card from St. Lou—the exposition—  
a love letter, a daguerrotype, the patriotic  
etching from *Godeys* magazine.  
Then turns over the clipping of the family crime,  
looks into the gray eye  
& slips it into her dress — ready now  
to leave for the trip west.  
She knows that the bowl of dust  
will not be the golden bowl  
of grapes & green orchards.  
The men cluster to the old Reo & dream  
on “the valley” as we dream  
on the photos, old movies, Guthrie songs  
so hungry that we think to feed  
on these gray tumbleweeds  
the parched roots as rigid as exposed nerves.

Dry wind  
& shallow roots.  
Dust blows  
away the horizon,  
texturing these photos,  
downing the fence wire,  
drowning the posts in drifts  
that blot all boundaries  
& leave us thinking a little will  
can make a past,  
a few posts a place to stand.  
Dry wind  
& we drift the prairies, eyes squinted  
against the gray sun that swells  
as it sinks into dust,  
squinted against the dust that blows within.



## **SHE WAS AFRAID OF LIGHT**

That winter she made a paper boat,  
poured his ashes into it, lit a candle  
in the center and pushed the boat  
to the middle of the lake.

The whole town saw it burn.  
That winter and into the summer  
she burned.  
She didn't look out the window.

Every night for nine years  
she walked to the lake  
to pitch stones  
until the night she couldn't hear water.  
She closed her eyes.

She lit all the lights in the house.  
Through the window she saw firemen  
uncurling their hoses.

## **LAST YEAR OUR BUILDING BROKE IN HALF**

Rooms split open; tenants scurried behind the remaining chairs like creatures from a damp log. Hanging our feet over the fourth floor, we ate lunch and watched the network of lines and wires that made us functional swing from the raw walls. For years they had held the building up against the waterfront wind; their sparks warmed our tea.

We stayed on half rent, living a cross-sectional study.  
A social worker charted our meat and fish dinners, quarrels, hours at television and books, how we adapted to a broken home, half a table, half a bed.  
We warmed ourselves between small fires and shortened our lives to half days and half nights.  
We learned to balance on the open edge of the living room with the torn electric wires creaking near us in the wind and we did not fall off.

## FROM A LINE BY CHARLES SIMIC

Something goes through the world  
continually raising and letting fall  
the voice, the hammer, the glass of wine.

From far away, it is a man  
dreaming underneath a tree.  
Approaching, you enter  
a city where all the walls  
are doors open. Music  
is synonymous with night.

As shade waters the light,  
talk waters quietness.  
Night and day succeed.

The maple tree sees the gleam  
of a sleeper preparing for bed  
in a house's eye. The wood  
and stone tell each other  
"good night." And both  
are simply seeds  
of a dream that prepares itself  
within the sleeper.

The corridor of morning air  
opens on a work site  
where the worker reaps diamonds  
from his brow.  
They purchase the opening  
of flowers in a season of fruit.



## SHINGLES, AN OPEN NOTEBOOK

For the last few days a woman has been walking by the hole in the street where a man is working. She comes by in the morning just after the man disappears down the hole and in the evening just before he reappears and begins rearranging his yellow defense system. Each time she walks by the hole she stops for a moment and looks to see what is in there. Always the man is there waiting, posing for a painting of the noble working man.

Another man sits on the porch of the white house closest to the hole in the street. He props a pen against his cheek and gazes quietly out into the street. Sometimes he writes something in a notebook.

Evening. Faint streaks of pink are beginning to stretch out from the horizon, illuminating the soft bellies of clouds. The air is calm and quiet. People are eating. The woman has come and gone as usual but the man has not yet climbed up out of his hole.

The man on the porch nods. Every few minutes he jerks, sits up straight, and again stares attentively toward the street. The pink bellies streak and begin to darken.

Morning. Two men drop yellow rubber dunce caps around the hole in the street and set up more yellow railings. They back a large motor mounted on a squat, yellow trailer up to the hole. They slide a large yellow tube into the hole and start the motor.

Late afternoon. The dunce caps, the motor, and the two men are gone. The yellow railing and an orange lunchbox remain. The man on the porch appears with a glass of lemonade. Leaving his notebook on the porch, he wanders out into the street carrying the lemonade. He leans on the yellow railing and peers down into the hole. He looks around to see if anyone is watching. He climbs down into the hole.

The woman is early. She gazes into the hole. Someone has stolen the painting. She looks up and notices the empty porch. She walks over to it. She notices the open notebook and begins reading. She sits

down. Cloud bellies darken. She leans her head back and closes her eyes.

Morning. The chugging of the yellow motor. More dunce caps. Two men are joking loudly. The woman on the porch murmurs and jerks awake. Leaving the notebook, she walks out into the street. She talks with the two men. She gestures with her hands as she speaks. The two men laugh loudly. She returns to the porch and begins writing in the notebook.

Noon. The two men and the yellow motor are gone. The woman wanders out into the street and gazes into the hole. She looks to see if anyone is watching. She climbs down into the hole.

I put the last shingle in place, climb down off the roof, and walk over to the porch. I pick up the notebook and begin searching. I begin rocking back and forth.

Slowly, motions begins in the street. Next door a man climbs onto the roof and begins replacing shingles.

## THE ARGUMENT

At this hour  
they are alike, brother and sister  
with the same long legs  
and spidery fingers lifting weeds  
from the fishpond. Scooping tadpoles  
into mayonnaise jars they fall

to argument:  
whether the cloud is a truck  
or a boy who forgot  
to close the rabbit hutch —  
*It's your turn*, he'll say  
with a sweep of his hand.  
But she'll wait  
inside the house

where the sun lays its stripe  
across the bamboo-printed curtains,  
the chair missing a cushion  
and her face in her hands  
definite now, individual.







## THE FATHER

Stuart Reed did not see the letter from his father until early evening, did not check the mailbox when he returned to the apartment in mid-afternoon. He spun with euphoria, with relief and exhaustion, hands functioning without his will, his mind riding across the last eighteen hours as though above a valley. He unlocked the door, swung it open into the apartment on which the curtains were closed, opening then so the sun could flash through the frosted window. The blanket still lay on the couch. The pillow had tumbled to the floor. He left them. Slipping off scarf and mittens, he swam to the telephone and dialed.

"Mom?" His tongue was heavy, words thickened. He unlaced his boots as he spoke. "Hi, Mom. It's a girl. . . We went in last night. . . I guess it was a long labor. Sure seemed that way."

She asked if he wanted to come for dinner that night.

"Sure. After visiting hours. That too late?"

She promised to keep something warm. He glanced out the window at the hard blue sky. The snow sloped and curled against the bare trees below. Last night. Starting the car. Cold. He went into the bedroom. Since they had never gotten to sleep, the bed was still made. Slipping off his clothes he ducked in, sheets chilly until his curled body warmed them. He waited for sleep to take him. Felt the luxury of sleep's sureness, let images drift one over the other — their breath puffing into the hospital doors, Bethy's lip bitten in pain, the slow clock in the labor room. . . Luxury. For it was done. Bethy slept. The baby slept. And he knew he would sleep.

It was on his way out of the apartment building that he stopped to check the mail and saw the air letter from his father. It was short. The words gripped. *I'm asking you to do this because I'm sure it will be easier for her coming from you. Tell her there's someone else. I'm not coming home.* There was a bit more. Some apology. But the main point of the letter was the request. *Tell her.*

He looked about the lobby, baffled, as though the place he stood in were new, as though he'd been set down suddenly in a strange city. Out the door. His feet skidded on ice, but he caught his balance on the sidewalk. Wind sharpened the air. By the time he got to his car his eyes ached, and he had to guard his cheek with his hand. The car had

some heat from the electrical warmer, so he waited a moment before starting it.

*Tell her.*

"Jesus Christ," he said. He pulled out of the snow-packed lot. What did he think he was, this man who was his father? Let him do his own dirty work! Off to England he'd gone for research. Mom would stay home until next summer when Allan and Nell were out of school. Then she'd come over. Big deal . . . He'd told her to go, let the kids stay with Bethy and him, let Nell help Bethy a bit. But no, no, no. She couldn't leave the children. Now he wondered whether that was her idea or his father's. *Tell her there's someone else.* How the hell could there be someone else?

By the time he got from the parking lot to the hospital, his beard was iced. His glasses steamed in the lobby, and he dried them on his scarf.

Hi," he said to Bethy. Her eyes wore their dark shadows like a mark of beauty. "How you feel?"

"Wonderful," she said.

He smiled. But he could not take in the luxuriance of her ease, just to lie there, to feel the pride and joy she felt.

She pulled at his hand. "What's the matter, Stu?"

"What makes you think anything's wrong?"

"Silly question."

"Okay," he said. "Let me look at the baby. And while I do, you read this letter from Dad."

He felt the letter should weight her hand, but she held it, her dark eyes on him. Large eyes in the small face that gave her slight person the deceiving delicacy of a dancer. Dr. Frank had warned about a Caesarean, but Bethy wanted the first naturally. He ran his knuckles along the sharp line of her jaw, made a mock face at her, and went to the nursery.

Dead to the world his daughter lay. Red and wrinkled. He'd sat beside Bethy the whole night and through the morning before they wheeled her off to delivery. Watched the pain of each contraction take her body like a claw, burning that skin-and-bones body, belly-distended body. Until after the night was done and the sun finally broke the frozen dawn, she began bearing down.

Red and wrinkled his daughter lay. The glass separated him from her, but he touched it with a finger as though by doing that he might



make touch. She didn't move. The bare belly with the dark cord pumped but he couldn't stir her.

Bethy's eyes swam with light when he came back. "Oh, Stu," she said.

"Can you beat it? What am I supposed to do?"

She was silent. As though to break silence she said, "Has he—ever—?"

"Played around? Not that I know of. But he's always been a renegade. Everybody at University knows about Angus Reed. They know he's an important scientist. They know anything goes in his classes. But nothing ever went beyond—You know what I mean. And Mom so much the other way. Watched his family while he grew famous. My God, who else could have lived with him?"

"Do you think he's really serious?"

"About this? What difference does that make? He's announced it."

"He always frightened me. He was so brusque. I'm glad you're not like him."

He squeezed her hand. "He frightened everybody. Big and abrupt. Wouldn't let anything stand in his way. Not even his family—"

"Stu."

"I'm serious. Not once, not one goddam time, did he take anybody with him. Always off to conferences and all of us stayed home."

"But he took you camping. He took you hunting."

"I know. But it's not the same thing. Like I don't think he did it for us. He wanted to go, and he was willing to pack us off to the woods with him. That was it. He's an egotist. Maybe that's what it takes."

"Don't be bitter."

"I'm sorry. By the way," he said, "that little monkey in the nursery sure looks godawful."

She stuck out her tongue. "She's beautiful."

He stayed until visiting hours were over, dreading the return to the cold, the drive to his mother's. At the desk in the lobby as he passed, a visitor spoke of 35° below. Not having been plugged in, the car started sluggishly. Inside, it was frigid. His breath frosted the windshield until he could turn the heater up. The car was only getting warm when he reached his mother's, though he drove across town. He pulled into the driveway so he could plug in at the outside socket, and went in the kitchen door.

The table was cleared except for a setting for him. Dirty dishes were piled, waiting till he finished, in the sink.

His mother came from the front room. "I'll get you some supper and you can tell me all about it."

He didn't want to eat, but he didn't want to tell her immediately, so he let her pull the casserole from the oven. She moved about the kitchen with sureness and ease. Her own lab. Would anyone ever put this quiet, large, and gentle-fleshed woman alongside the tall and angular chemist? Would anyone think to see them that they were husband and wife? She'd never been a thin girl, he knew that from old snapshots, but she'd had a tighter plumpness when she married her skinny neighborhood boyfriend.

She sat across from him. "I'm so pleased," she said. "I know your father will be, too. He said in his last letter to be sure and let him know."

"He said that?"

"Of course. Didn't I show you? I'll go get it—"

"No, that's okay."

"Angus likes Bethy very much."

He smiled. "You've never told me that before."

"Well, it's the truth." She glanced at his plate. "Aren't you going to eat?"

"Mom, I got a letter from Dad today. He wanted me to tell you something."

She didn't show alarm. She had too much trust in the rightness of things. What words? The quickest ones.

"He said to tell you — to say he's found someone else."

Her expression did not change.

"He won't be coming back, that's what he said. He's found someone else and he won't be coming back to you."

A flush rose in her face, a brightness like water piling up her throat and across her cheeks and into the line of her dark hair. The depth of its color frightened him. Her hands were on the table. She lifted one and touched her forehead with it, tipping her head slightly to meet the plump fingers.

"Mom," he said, "you're all right?"

She looked at him and smiled. "No, I'm not all right," she said. "But don't worry. Why did he make you do this?"

"I guess he was ashamed. He was worried about you—"

"Do you have his letter?"

He handed it to her, and she read it. "Just like all his letters. Not an extra something anywhere."



"I showed Bethy."

"Good. No sense trying to keep it secret, is there?"

He said desperately, "I'd like to know why."

"I can only guess. Angus has always been full of surprises."

Then, as though to be busy, she started the dishes. He dried. The same old scene. The suds snowing up around the yellow gloves on her hands. Setting each rinsed dish in the rack. He felt he was acting on a tightrope, wavering above an emptiness he had to pretend was not there. Finally, she looked at him with a curious and small hardness to her mouth. Her dark eyes were brighter.

"You haven't suspected, have you?"

"I didn't know anything, Mom. There are all kinds of stories on campus about Dad. But none of them hinted at that."

"Did that lab tech — Florence what's-her-name — go with him?"

"I can check."

"It doesn't matter. I think we better be open about this. We can't hide it."

He remembered Bethy's words. "Maybe he's not really serious about it."

"You know Angus."

Did he? Stuart could picture without difficulty the way the two of them, husband and wife, came together — growing up in the same prairie town, attending the same church, moving about in daily closeness. But could there have been a time in their histories when Angus and Wilma Reed ever stood side by side, balanced, he and she? Not since he'd been born twenty years ago. Perhaps in some long ago era, in the days when those snapshots were taken — when Angus had pulled his hometown sweetheart out of her first year at University to marry her and sire first a daughter and then a son. But no, not since that son had been born.

Later, slipping on his boots again, zipping up his coat, wrapping his scarf about his neck, he was struck suddenly by memory, shuttled into a different place and time, back to a younger body and fresher thoughts. He found himself in two places. By another kitchen door he stood mittened and scarved. Hurry or you'll miss the school bus. That kitchen was larger. The wind sluiced in at the door. Its greater amplitude accommodated better the woman who stood before him.

He asked, "Why did we leave the farm, Mom?"

The rest of the farmhouse was frigid, but the kitchen was warm, warm to dash for from the cold bedroom he shared with Allan, his

younger brother.

"Was it because Dad wanted to move into town?"

She nodded, her hand on the door knob. "He had to be closer to the lab. He had to be able to get in readily, and the winters were too big a wear on him. You know how he'd have to stay in town overnight sometimes when he worked late. Then he'd worry about us."

"He would?"

"Oh, Stuart."

He squeezed her shoulder. "Sorry."

"Besides," she said, "he didn't have the nerves or patience for it. Frozen pipes, hauling water . . . And I remember the time the pump to the well went wrong in the middle of winter . . . Oh, it infuriated him — a real frenzy. All that kind of thing kept him from his work, and he couldn't tolerate it. He's a driven man, Stuart. I really don't understand him, I guess, and I never have. I've just tried to go along with him. I guess I failed. With people like him you have to accommodate yourself. He doesn't change. You've got to be the one that changes."

He wanted to say: I won't. I won't change for him.

"You be careful," she said. "In some ways you're like him."

"Never," he said, kissing her to leave.

At the apartment he showered again and slipped into the bed still unmade from his nap. But he could not sleep. Finally, he turned on the light. Almost 4:00. He got a drink of water from the kitchen, a glimpse of his bearded face in the window, white shaped by blackness. The linoleum chilled his bare feet. He put on slippers and robe.

*Tell her I'm not coming home.*

He paced. What had made him think of the farm? Going out the back door tonight the same way he'd gone out to catch the schoolbus . . . The memory of an earlier time. Eight years ago. It had been — how long? — since he'd thought of the farm. He'd forgotten the time they went without water for three weeks. He'd forgotten the image of his father holding the torch to thaw the pipes. Yet whatever his mother had said, something was different then. At times the stringy body had relaxed. There were big-toothed smiles, an arm around the plump wife . . . There was bitching, too. But Stuart found that the pleasanter image had been the most prominent one in his memory. Now this other man . . .

"In some ways you're like him." Hell of a thing for his mother to say.



Sure they'd moved into town because Angus wanted to. How he'd grumbled out there on the river. Stuart could hear the voice — pitched high and a bit harshly, able to cut through any crowd. Complaint spilled out of the lean face. Words from the wide mouth came as wracked grumbling. This other man.

So who was the woman he screwed now? What did she offer? How far had Angus Reed slipped? How could the son — or anyone — account for the slide?

*. . . I'm not coming home. . .*

He hadn't seen the farm in three or four years. He dressed. Scarcely 6:00. Still he was wide awake. His nerves polkaed.

Bitter cold. He could hardly get the car into reverse. Turning out of the parking lot, the wheels moved as though in hardening mud. He was crazy to go in this Canadian prairie weather, he told himself. How could he verify that older vision?

Streets lay deserted and icy. He crossed the railroad tracks and already, dark as it was, the road felt familiar. His headlights picked up the banks of snow thrown higher than a man to either side of the road. The snow on the road, unplowed since the last storm two days ago, was thick and powdery. No worry. Only a drift too deep would turn him back. He could go all the way out with the road like this — past the forestry farm, past the curve of the river that touched it, past the Charolais cattle ranch. A jackrabbit, white with winter, broke loose and lunged ahead of him before shooting off into the field.

Going back, he thought. To what? He thought of summer, an earlier Angus, an earlier season. Shirt removed to work in the garden, white ribs shiny in the sun. A rock spun off the river during a summer walk.

Only a freak drift . . . No: safe home.

But eyes sharpened, he caught ahead at the tip of his lights what seemed to be a wave — rushing toward him as he braked the car. He climbed out. No wind. The air, however, cut to the roots of his teeth, stiffened the breath on his beard. This drift. . . Surely he could get a run and push through.

Cold. His toes leaden. Angus would bitch like mad.

He backed up and drove head-on. All the way through, the way through. . . But he was stopped. Back out and try again.

One more time. Stop griping, Angus, he thought. He heard the voice as though it came from his own mouth. "Shut up, Angus," he said. He thought momentarily of Bethy asleep in the hospital, how

large her eyes looked in sleep, how long the lashes, how calm the face. Watch this, Angus.

He drove forward again, steering in his own tracks, into the drift and forward. But not all the way. Christ. He could hear Angus griping. Shut up, shut up. He opened the door and looked over, standing on the seat. He'd hardly moved forward. Should he shovel through? Too much of the drift remained.

He closed the door, feeling drained and weakened. What now?

*Tell her I'm not coming home. . .*

He put the car in reverse, but got no traction. Forward, no traction. He muttered aloud. The wheels whined. Gripe, gripe.

Acting like a fool, he told himself. The sun would start to rise before long. He could walk it, bundled as he was to a farmhouse. Or he could wait for someone to come. But the anger had risen in him.

Behind him, the sky was growing pale. What would he find at the farm? A house, a river, bare trees in the windbreak. . . What more? How much left? What assurance?

*Tell her I'm not coming home. . .*

Cursing, he lunged from the car, snow to his knees, gripping the shovel.

"Angus!" he cried. Alone. "Angus!"

This time he hurled the shovel. But the gloves on his hands clumsied his effort and the shovel struck a fencepost, lay there a dark implement on white. He knew the sense of betrayal he felt was explainable, readily so, thinking of himself, the son standing here in the cold, in the waste, his father's words printed in his brain. But even accepting that, there was something deeper and darker that had caused him to cry out, that started a shiver in the seam of his back. There was no home out there. His teeth chattered.

What road into any territory he could hope for, what denials now could ever make secure a home? That was the hell of it, what wracked his bones as he stood in the cold. Look at Angus. Still, he'd better go back to town, take the road back to town.

He retrieved the shovel, his feet snapping the crust on the snow. Within ten minutes he had dug himself out, raising a sweat in his armpits.

The apartment when he walked into it looked like something that had been waiting for him. He pulled off boots and shoes inside the door and dropped his coat, scarf, and gloves on one end of the couch.



In spite of his weariness, he didn't feel like sleeping. He made coffee, spilling grounds on the counter. His hand trembled as he spooned sugar, and he spilled that. For a time his mind would not settle on anything. Angus, his mother, Bethy, the farm, the baby — his wrinkled and mysterious daughter. . . He had a seminar this afternoon that Bethy would want him to attend. The scalding coffee burned his tongue. Finally he stood, leaving the cup in its dark ring on the kitchen table.

"Tell her I'm not coming home," he muttered. Hell of a thing. His voice rumbled like something unused. Like the road he'd just been on and all that lay behind the drift — the farm, his youth, Angus and Wilma Reed at one point in their lives. . . Then there was what lay before him on the road back to town, driving it in the thin morning light with a curving sun dog in the sky.

Glancing about he saw the mess he'd made — the rumpled bed, his cast-off clothes on the couch, the dirty coffee cup and the stains in the kitchen, all here in the apartment he and Bethy lived in. Couldn't allow that, not in this place. He picked up and scrubbed up. Here, now. . .

He looked for a moment at the crib crowding their bedroom. The sheet covering the mattress was stretched tight and clean. He remembered Bethy folding shirts and nightgowns, receiving blankets, smoothing them with her hands, putting them away in the top drawer. He stared at the empty crib. My daughter, he thought. A new sense of himself came with the idea, a sense that brought a flush of joy. Still stinging where they had been exposed to the cold, he felt the muscles of his face relax.

He went to the telephone. He ran his fingers through his rumpled hair and beard. Bethy might still be sleeping — he hoped she was — so he dialed his mother, the grandmother of his child. He — the father.

## **OUT-OF-STEP**

Let me stroke that hurt leg.  
My grandmother had one too.  
And your grandfather and mine  
met in a foreign land  
and predicted that someday  
we'd walk side-by-side.  
The cat who always circles me  
has been waiting in the wings  
while our arms have been entwined  
and this cat is mewling  
at a hawk who is screaming  
and flying over your grandmother  
on the day she was born.  
Where the road leads cursed and charmed  
we're running side-by-side.  
Your words have taken on my color.  
The bells of your breath  
are filled with my breathing.  
The cat mews.  
In the fields our grandparents are screaming.

But there are other years too.  
Our legs can't keep on walking.  
Yours was injured in the eye of a storm  
on a day pressed into my memory  
when our child was waving in my womb.  
The girl in the phone booth  
whom you didn't know  
had pressed herself against you  
and allowed you to kiss her.  
The cat had curled at her side,  
the hawk had screamed above her  
like a wicked blessing,  
screamed until she walked out-of-step beside you.  
Where the road spreads itself open in alarm

I stumble towards an alley.  
When will I hear our pet dove coo?  
In her shallow grave  
my grandmother is rocking and rocking.  
Please soothe my hurt leg,  
she croons and she coos.  
And overhead the sky closes in.



## LETTER TO NANCY STEELE FROM ALASKA

High above the low, smoky-blue  
February clouds, a single-prop plane  
whines through the afternoon  
toward another falling sun.  
The city streets, we with rain  
and soft half-melted ice, teem  
with weekend traffic. Paradise  
is Celsius one degree.

I'm told the ravens here  
live ninety years or more.  
Unashamed, they congregate  
to feast on refuse in the street,  
strutting through the gutters  
beside booted, scurrying feet,  
twisting their scuffed necks  
to point one angry haywire eye  
at any sign of intrusion  
from any passerby.

They long outlast the fireweed  
that blazes in the hills,  
the handsome magpies with long  
delicate tails gliding low  
across a thousand summer fields.  
They survive on terror and legend  
and shout with a cracking voice,  
saving their finest songs  
for the orchestra of their wings.

Stunted Sitka spruce grow dense  
beyond the edge of town. Their limbs  
are green, no sign of snow, their trunks  
more slender than a thigh.  
Here and there, a grove of birch  
thrusts ominous



black and spidery boughs  
from trunks as pale as cream.  
In the moonlight on a clear  
cold night they ring  
like the ghost of a deathly chime.

Standing in the roadside shadow,  
half lost in the shadows of trees,  
bewildered or amused, an old cow moose  
nibbles her winter grass  
watching the rushing traffic  
headed for Eagle River  
or for Chugiak. Her great ears  
slowly turn at a horn or at  
a diesel stack. Wide, her nostrils  
flare with every massive breath.

The last timid rays of daylight  
limp across the peaks. Another plane  
falls into night with a shriek.  
I remember the insane flat roads  
of Iowa, the legends that went sour.  
I remember the heat of the south,  
the bright autumn-in-Montana tamarack.  
The night falls thick and black about me,  
cold as a raven's wing. The rented sheets  
are cool across my back. I sleep  
to dream unsettling dreams, hoping  
all these aching, aging bones can make  
the next town, somehow, home.

## **WARMING UP AT CAPE ALAVA**

In weather like this  
my grandfather's people  
wore buffalo robes,  
coats that weighed down  
even warriors. Here  
on the coast, lean men  
hung hammered cedar bark  
about their shoulders,  
let rough cloaks toughen skin.

Shivering, I shed my flimsy bag,  
move to Sally and slip on  
the warm shirt of her breath.  
Down the beach the sea  
hones her thick tongue  
on rocks. If she says anything  
it is "Yes, yes."

## WHERE THE LINES CROSS

*"Remember: Wherever you go, there you are."*

1.

Below decks my shipmates dream  
in dim quarters, their pulses  
the pulse of the engines.  
I balance above them on the flying  
bridge, knees flexed for the ship's roll,  
here for stars, their chilled light  
bright ulcers caught in the sky's lining:

*Altair, Betelgeuse, Capella, Deneb.*

They catch in my sextant's mirrors  
and I bring them down, bring them down  
plumb to the smooth line  
of the sea's belly, rock them  
in a slow arc and match  
this angled kiss with the *tic*  
the precise *tic* of the stopwatch.

If I followed these sparks back  
on themselves, kept to a straight path,  
the stars would not be there,  
would have spun away. This does not matter.

The moon grows old, grows pale and old,  
snags in the rigging. Light  
whets itself into the bright blade of day.

2.

In the wheelhouse  
I settle down to figure  
the intricate choreography  
stars dance to, avoid lies  
of height above water, sky's refraction,



distance from Greenwich. And time,  
the four glass-cased chronometers  
rocking in brass gimbols.

I set the rules on the compass rose,  
walk them across the chart  
over Australia, over islands unnamed,  
over miles of blank ocean,  
draw my lines. In that delicate asterisk,  
where the lines cross  
in this slow breath of dawn,  
I can tap my finger, thinking

*There I am*

even as I move on.

## OTHER

There's only one good reason to call  
the passenger pigeon a buffalo.  
What's the difference. There's a moment  
you become an empty place, and  
there's the moment after. My  
brother will never point and go *Oh,*  
*look, a passenger pigeon.* No, not  
if one came back. Not if they all came back,  
having mixed themselves whole, again,  
from their diffusion — elements,  
torn from flesh and rain and charcoal, refashioned  
as birds. Because I don't have  
a brother. He follows me, in something that's to  
me as gasp is to voice — and I'm  
afraid of falling in. He's the brother  
everybody doesn't have, the chromosome  
combination that could have been you but  
wasn't, and then wasn't him. A brother  
doesn't have this brother. This is something of  
the way sun casts a shadow but never  
has one. A sister won't have this brother,  
a mother this son. He will not die,  
the wind threads a gasp and this is  
the suit he won't wear in the grave. He's  
here, even now, beside us and sometimes  
in comparison to the day's long slaps and charges,  
he's a comfort — continuity  
is. He's pointing, even now, to the uncrumpled  
photo in which I'm five years old and  
straddling the park's stuffed bison. He  
gasps, *Look, a passenger pigeon.* He  
always never made that mistake, so  
cute, and we always never loved him for it.

## WICHITA

—KSD

Smell of Teddi's green beans like snapping  
fingers through the air. In a while a brown, a  
roast beef, blankets it. Outside,  
Tony's hefting the planks in. Over thirty,  
he'll kid about no longer getting  
it up or dreams that leave him shaking.

I've come to the middle of Kansas, a month  
with them, my own reasons a small motor  
and its awful noise. But one week  
here and everything's quiet. This is the light  
and the quilt and the water they've given me,  
and from my window  
Teddi's garden's a patterning: spokes  
for the earth's great turning. Tony's  
middle years, where even he can't see them,  
bide time with the fragrance  
at the center of wood and he'll reach it  
and breathe in heady. I would tell him this  
but he's busy sanding.

These are the standard cats  
and plants of simple moments  
in simple middle-class lives in my generation.  
One's tipping the other  
over as I write, and it turns out my real reason  
to be here is to record  
it's allright.

A clay pot lays with a  
lightningzag of breakage up its side and Pussfoot's  
cloverleaf mudprints skulking off — but  
even so, the cactus angled  
askew into dusk's wan light is a lever,  
no matter its direction, pushing toward balance. And



in the complex skin of this  
and that it runs a simple heart.

After dinner we crush plums for wine; a sweet, a  
mutual, stain on us. A year from now they'll  
drink my share in the taste. It  
darkens. Linda Ronstadt, spinning on the stereo.  
It darkens more, the house in a black that brings  
out star and cricket like a polishing-rag  
rubbing distance. By the middle of the dusk  
they're on the couch, close, almost a fine stone  
and its bas-relief.

Tony and Teddi,  
the deepness, Ronstadt's voice an old friend, and the house  
in night, the house in acquiescence.

Nobody touches the dial, nobody  
turns the volume up, but  
it's a quality of our life here in the middle,  
the music grows louder  
as the day grows less.

## **SLEEPSONG**

It's dusk — I mean night and day,  
plaited. This is the rope, the  
gray rope, the heavy world  
hangs from.

Isn't everything  
done in the limited shading  
of turn-of-the-century cameras,  
isn't everything withdrawn  
just an inch  
inside its own clear outline?  
What's left, that haze, floats  
somewhere between a  
drunk's blur and an angel's nimbus.

Now if I lift my hands from my eyes  
the darkness remains. And now the  
knots in my muscles, the whole  
long afternoon's work, undo — a  
child's tallystring  
in me, clearing itself for tomorrow.

## NINE PARTS OF THESE DAYS

### I

Now I see I have done.  
I have done everything wrong.  
Friends are no longer drifting  
the aisles, that clock is a vigorous  
tick. I want to be home.  
Red bugs raised in this night  
decide what they must do. Walk.  
Beware the corner, it is a snake.  
This night I am through forgiving,  
through becoming an inch, no miles left  
and no steps. I stop  
with seven words to give up:  
mother home water brown dark  
tree and dirt. I have left  
and this is it.

### II

Coats shrug off shoulders and rest.  
Even old brooms have nice homes in the halls.

Do you know the riddle of oceans?  
That when you step in, you sink?

In oozing fungus, little creepers dig in.  
In this way, they live out the cold.

She drank all she could of salt drink.  
Her fingers picked open shells.

Rocks make homes in dirt for themselves.  
The sea, it keeps rushing at her.



III

These days go by fast and we don't count.  
Nothing counts anymore but your hand  
on my arm saying yes, this  
is the way, this way  
we won't have to forget.  
I've been writing letters  
unaddressed in envelopes  
written to you. They pile  
naked in stacks on my desk.  
Keep in touch, you say to the walls  
of the library, concrete and full  
of your law. I tell you  
I keep on falling, the weight  
of your body pressing  
against what I have to do.

IV

Walking this morning for money, I keep  
my insides clean. Someone is singing.

How do we know when the bridge opens?  
Hold one finger to wind.

If it stays wet, you're in luck.  
Otherwise, draw the frontiers.

Opening the present of hands, the rain  
falls down in dribbles. Five fingers.

The boundary closes between love and hate.  
Through the wide gates, much rushing.

V

Each time I bury my heart, light  
seeps in through dirt.  
The last time it happened, yesterday,  
I sat all night.  
Leaves outside my window turn  
with a color too late to begin.  
This time the pale red of pounding  
closes inside my ears.  
I underline words, bending  
to hear the beat  
inside our hands, these bridges broken.

VI

Bugs and bears know the way of the jungle,  
only, they are smarter than me.

If I can't lie, I'll have to whistle.  
Sound rings itself like tin.

Once I saw a girl in a cloak  
made of grass. She swayed.

The green girl one day picked up her shoes.  
Dark churches go along on their avenues.

Heavy boots stomp signs in new snow.  
Tongues flapping, her shoes plan escape.

VII

Wind carries small seeds in your hand  
and it is open. I pry  
into what I can see. Nothing  
obsesses, you say, holding your knee.  
My hand is limp inches away.

This morning, like any other, the leaves  
on my windowsill turn  
away from my looking. The street  
remains empty, I shuffle  
through years of return.  
How many times will I wait  
and say listen, my ears are resting.

VIII

He will be walking on cement. I will say,  
Hello, it's been a long time.

February is still a cold month, no matter  
what they say. Somebody stole my coat.

I hope they like those nice feathers.  
Didn't you always like me in green?

I think his eyes turn my way.  
My new coat is brown, like his hair.

Mostly I try not to think. It gets in my way  
when I'm trying to make conversation.

IX

Not that it wasn't a nice coat, just  
that it was too shiny.  
Of all my things, this  
was not precious, as nothing is  
anymore. Leaves gather and winter  
comes in open windows, a scent  
of bare hills. Covers thrown,  
I ask you in to share night  
and think about ferns, how they push



against dirt, going under each fall.  
My sister, the coat stealing woman,  
each day forgets she grows old.

I trust heat, my skin  
to keep in this weather.  
Ice freezes salt and the coat  
you offer I'd wear all my life.  
Even here with you, it gets that cold.

## ON WILLIAMS STREET

I am here in the deep shade of the bluff  
Leaning, on a day in June,  
Against a huge slab  
Of limestone  
Left among the ferns and birch  
By the cutters who went home  
And never returned, who turned instead  
Into those thick-armed men I see  
In work-shirts  
Pictured, circa 1902,  
In the county museum on Williams Street,  
Who turned and are riding the rest  
Of their lives on huge blocks  
Down the gray face  
Of the hill,  
Floating still as the stones  
And the wind they ride  
In the county museum on Williams Street.

And as this long bluff begins to cool,  
And the swallows are out riding  
The air in the quarry,  
I can hear myself  
When I step close and breathe  
Into the blow-holes, hear myself  
Far back in the stone.  
And for an instant, the bluff is alive,  
Breathing the long slow breaths  
Of my father, whom I see  
Along with these men  
In the county museum on Williams Street.  
Also Old Joe who sometimes stands  
In the warm evenings at the edge  
Of our lawn,  
Crazy with age, afraid of the long

Climb down the stone steps  
That fall away in grass,  
And that end at the Home where he's washed  
And bedded down, and lies alone  
In his white pajamas;  
Who dreams each night he's out  
Over the elms, riding a shining slab  
Down with the swallows, down  
Into the old freight yard,  
Pictured cold and desolate in 1902,  
In the county museum on Williams Street.





## **BURL HARDWICK'S REVENGE**

One time a man called Burl Hardwick sat and waited and listened for the clouds that would rumble up behind the dark woods stretching out along Mauvaisterre Creek. He'd sat in the slickworn leather arm chair every night now for nearly fifty, maybe fifty-two years and brooded over the things that happened to him once, the lynching of Ed Garvey after the Great War in France, when his brother Emory moved to town the next day and the waiting began, sitting there through years he'd almost forgotten with his wife Sarah, until he and the boy Willie buried her without fanfare up behind the house fourteen — yes, it was that long, fourteen — years ago one morning after a blizzard, just like his family'd always done and he'd found small comfort in the destroyed leather chair when his son Bill packed up on a Thursday afternoon with that woman named Linda he'd married and five hundred dollars cash money, said they were quits, going to Los Angeles, someplace like that maybe, someplace without doubt far from Exeter, Illinois, and leaving the boy Willie with him and Sarah to raise up, just like he was their own, like they was starting out back in the days when many of the stories he'd later tell the boy were made, far back when his shoulder didn't hurt, before he'd lost the left eye burning down Dave Kinison's house after the lynching and Kinison's suicide. As far back as those days Burl Hardwick had been waiting in this chair after work every day on the farm and they all knew he was crazy, maybe dangerous, lurking way out there around the old house, keeping a tight hold on them all because of what he knew and refused to forget, refused to let slip away into earth like all things must, keeping even the dead alive, always right there in plain sight of the house where a man could look up over his breakfast and watch the grass move while he diced his eggs and the two or sometimes as many as three goats wander among the stones and crop what of the grass they could, always failing to stop the jimsones and lamb's quarter, mullen and poppies that would not let things rest ever.

So Burl Hardwick sat and waited one Monday night for Willie to get home from town and for a rain storm that was about to happen.

It was easy. He let his one eye enclose the room like a worn-out glove and felt the house quake slightly every now and again with the



thunder, knowing they were out there, the clouds like black elephants, and he knew by heart the trail they'd take across the flatlands heading this way from town, then stumbling helter-skelter down through the hills and the creek, so that soon the rain would run in gray slabs off the corrugated roof of the barn, beating a trench in the dirt and weeds along the foundations of all the buildings, barn, smokehouse, tool shed, the home itself, built in the first century of this country by Giles Hardwick, who ran away from Kentucky and someplace else before that, and he knew as well that the few cattle would stand shocked and stupid, their butts turned to the wind and despairing rain. If he still owned horses, they'd panic and wheel from one edge of the pasture to the other, lightning caught in their bugged-out eyes. But Burl Hardwick didn't own anymore horses. They were gone now too, like his son Bill and there was a picture of Bill from the second war, no medals and the cheeks that dried-out rose color the way they tinted them in those days a long time ago, the way he remembered the horses, and Bill still near that same age today for all the old man knew, or maybe dead someplace, the rose color come finally true under a mortician's hand, kind of like this room, its tarnished brass lamps, unstrung doilies had come finally true under his hand with Sarah gone, same as that creek, the Mauvaisterre come finally true when he walked alone to Kinison's and burned the place up lock, stock and barrel and went home to mend until he met his wife one day when her automobile broke down not far from the house on Pulling's Bridge and he got it fixed and they talked there, both knowing it was sheerest accident the engine backfired and flooded on that incline, greater accident he'd heard the noise and nothing short of blessed Goddamned miracle he went to see what happened. That was how it was, alright, and he'd been walking in a big wide circle around those days ever since, trying to figure out the why of something couldn't even be looked at full in the face. Or so he figured now, waiting with what passed for alone in a house full of dead people going back almost a hundred and thirty years.

"Get on home," Burl Hardwick said to the clock, "Get on home," to the ashtray Willie used, as though Willie sat there with a live ash poised above the glass lip, "Get on home," wondering what happened on the long nights alone when the boy came back, usually sober but maybe drunk, his arm hooked around the door jamb while he glared about the room and mumbled, then stomped off upstairs. "I expect he'll get back soon," Burl Hardwick said finally and closed his eyes,



feeling the weight of the glass one droop down against his cheek, listening to the thick breeze tugging at the mysterious woods that enclosed the Mauvaisterre like green skin and dampened the glow of streetlights from Exeter, where six men hunched over one end of a long, polished bar. The men were all turned away from Willie Hardwick, all looking up at the TV mounted in the corner and Willie remembered how a few years back Millard Dunson draped his saloon in dark bunting when the ancient oval black and white set passed on and all the regulars hoisted champagne to their old pal, who'd brought them fantastic tales of baseball and the South Pacific, where the gray seas plunged into rich blue somewhere, and somewhere the sloe-eyed girls would bring you drinks filled with chunks of fruit swimming in rum, then wrap their brown arms around your bare chest as you watched out over the lagoon. There was the sound of men talking and horses running. Coral-colored light played on the glassware. Behind him, the room was dark and quiet. Willie didn't have to turn to know the room was empty. You just get a feeling for things like that, like knowing what night a calf will drop without counting days or calling a vet. The man at the far end of the bar, the man nearest the TV, moved his right hand back to his hip and rested it on the white pearl handle of a gun.

"I hear this might be the last year for *Guns smoke*," Sally Quinlin said, "so don't any of you guys even think about football. Football's a game for sissies."

The other men in the Exeter Hotel bar laughed. They were about Quinlin's age, late forties, early fifties, and knew from other nights, other heros, that sometimes a man needs solitude. Anyway, Sally Quinlin had tried too many times to get Willie in jail and Willie kept out of his way. Once, nearly ten years ago, when they were still in high school, Willie told Darrall Crawford what it was like to be the local trash and Darrall said, "Yes," clattering his crutches like the frail wooden bones of dead birds, "Yes, the Lord will get you."

"Another?"

Now, Darrall was dead too, flown away on the wings of his own promise.

"Another?"

Willie looked up at Millard Dunson and said, "Someday I'm going to get me one of those Hamm's Beer bears and turn him loose in here. Right in the middle of *Guns smoke*."

"What's with you, Digger?" Millard leaned against the liquor

cabinet and rested his white sleeves on a full plaid vest. "Am I going to get trouble from you again?"

"Not if you lay off with that 'Digger' business," Willie said. He set his glass on the bar and slowly ran a finger around the rim. "You know, they say real crystal will kind of sing when you do it like this." He dipped his finger in the beer and again circled the lip of the silent glass. "This is a long way from crystal, Millard."

Dunson laughed and shock waves rippled along the vest. "Any bears there ever were around here are a long time killed off." Millard was like a huge bag of skin stuffed with wet sand and topped off with curly blond hair that followed closely after the bears. "And you wouldn't know crystal from your granddad's glass eye," he said from somewhere behind his blank face, "Digger."

"Millard, it's a commercial and we're dry down here." As you would expect, the shout came from Sally Quinlin.

"Coming, Sal." Millard composed his bartender's face, paused for an instant in front of Willie, then turned away and ambled toward the men. "Me and Digger was having a talk."

"Don't waste time on him," Quinlin said. He leaned far back on the stool and looked down at Willie. "He'll be gone in the blink of an eye. Vanished. Busting rocks at Vandallia or someplace." Quinlin squared his shoulders toward Willie and the badge sparkled.

"Why don't we just pair off and get it done with?" Willie said.

"You know, it ain't fair," Herbert Watson said. He sat beside Quinlin and threw his arms in the air.

"Shut up, Herb," Quinlin said. Then, to Willie, "If there was any justice you and that old man would've been put away years ago." Quinlin eased his legs from under the bar and started to stand, but Watson reached up and held his shoulders.

"I'm telling you it ain't fair," Watson said again.

"I know that," Quinlin said patiently. "And I'm going to shut him up."

"Who?"

"Hardwick."

"I don't mean him," Herbert Watson said. "Who cares about him? I'm talking about my cousin from Pittsfield. He's an actor and he got on *Gunsmoke* once. I saw it."

"What's unfair about that?" Millard Dunson said.

"It ain't fair that you've got to be a success just to get a two-bit part on *Gunsmoke* and have Matt Dillon whip your ass . . . that's what



ain't fair."

"You feel better?" Quinlin asked.

Herbert Watson nodded.

Sally Quinlin sat down and turned back to the TV. "Please," he said over his shoulder, "please, Digger, give me a reason."

Willie looked at himself in the long mirror behind the bar. Your name Digger doesn't make sense with the straight, clipped hair and blurred features.

"Look at me," Herbert Watson was saying. "I'm a meatcutter."

She may have been your grandmother, but she was Burl's wife and it was him, Burl, that decided on just sticking her in the ground like that, and you can't even remember for sure what happened. Watson's voice kept getting louder and Willie turned to listen.

"Been a meatcutter all my life and spent most of that time trying to keep people from calling me a butcher."

"Settle down, Herb," Dunson said.

"I'll never be a success," Watson said.

Now, Burl stays out on that farm like he always did and everything for you has been wadded up into a nickname, Digger, and even if somebody uses it only out of habit, you still remember flashes of how the spade bit your hands in the cold. With only a couple of thousand people in Exeter, it wasn't easy to keep a secret, especially that one.

"Sometimes my wife even calls me a butcher," Watson said. "I can't sleep nights."

Willie swallowed the last of his beer. As he was getting ready to leave, he turned and saw the door open and a man slip inside. Willie could tell from the mushroom shape that it was Bucket Hawkins, though his face was invisible in the darkness at the far side of the room. Willie shook his head. With Bucket, it could turn into a long night.

"Glad I caught you," Bucket said. "I was afraid I'd have to stand up to Millard alone."

"Lots of company," Willie said, waving his hand at the men.

Millard padded toward them, carrying two fresh beers.

"Millard the Miracle," Bucket said. "My life is complete with you. Anymore, I feel just like one of the boys."

"Thanks," Millard said. "And you restore my faith."

Bucket raised his glass to Willie. "May the bird of Paradise fly up your nose."

"Statler Brothers, 1963," Willie said.



"Was it that long ago? Eleven years. I'm old, I'm old. Someday I'll come up with a line you can't place." Bucket scratched his nose. "Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread."

"Down with all wise men," Willie said, hoisting his glass. "And I think you blew the line. But it's no better than wise men deserve."

"Shame on you," Bucket said. "I've been trying to grow this moustache so I'll look like a wise man." He traced his finger along the smooth chestnut line under his nose.

"It won't work," Willie told him. "By the time that thing gets big enough to see at all, your cheeks will be so fat they'll cover it up."

"What the hell. Wise men all have fat cheeks too. Look at all those old Chinese guys. They're the wisest men in the world and they all got fat pink cheeks." Bucket pulled at the thin lip hairs. "And skinny moustaches, too. Long and skinny. Length before strength. That's right. You can always trust those Chinese oldtimers."

"And to hell with Chinese oldtimers, too," Willie said.

Bucket shook his head and put his hand on Willie's back. "My friend, you have no faith in history. Them Chinese have been around for thousands of years, so they must have an in on something. Personally, I think it's moustaches." He shrugged and sipped beer, then wiped his mouth on the cuff of his shirt. "Now look at Millard down there. Don't he look Chinese?"

"You really are dumb," Willie said. "Are you doing this to me on purpose?"

"No, no. He thinks like a Chinaman. How else could he keep the peace in here? One Saturday night in this joint has got to equal at least a hundred years of Chinese History." Bucket stroked his chin thoughtfully. "That makes Millard at least sixty-five thousand years old — in relative historical terms."

Briefly, the streetlight again flashed into the tavern as the door opened for another customer. Willie didn't bother to look around. Bucket was rolling now and he'd have to work hard just to keep up.

"What about the Indians?" Willie said. "The gurus? Don't you think they're pretty smart?"

"Smart, maybe," Bucket said, "but never wise. Look at how scrawny and scraggly they are. Believe me, a Wise Man knows how to get a good meal."

"You're full of crap."

"The first true sign of wisdom," Bucket said soberly. "Who's the young lady?" He pointed into the mirror, then abruptly stood and

walked to the newly occupied table.

Willie slid off the stool and followed. As he got closer, he could see that it was Kristen Goreman. She sat with her head lowered, face partially hidden behind a dark-colored scarf. Her foot jiggled nervously on the floor. She seemed impatient. Willie hadn't seen her here before. They always start out impatient, always expecting something to happen just because they're around. His head spun slightly as he approached the table, and Willie balanced himself against a chair. Bucket sat down next to her without saying a word.

"You are in the presence of a Wise Man," Willie said.

Bucket tipped his head, acknowledging the introduction. Kristen pulled off the scarf and ran the fingers of both hands along the back of her neck and up through her hair, flipping it out along the sides of her face. She couldn't have been over nineteen or twenty, but you knew she was one of those who hadn't needed time to grow up. In a small town like Exeter, Kristen Goreman could walk around wearing nothing but her name and still have more self-assurance than most people could muster in a new suit of clothes. She motioned for Willie to sit.

"Which one of you is going to say it?" Kristen asked, looking from side to side at both men.

"Say what, my dear?" Bucket said.

"I don't know. Something about nice girls and shifty places like this."

Bucket picked up her hand from the table and said, "But that assumes you're a nice girl. As a Wise Man, I would never jump to a conclusion like that."

"Bucket thinks he's on the trail of the Chinese secret to long life," Willie said. "You and I know he's a fool. But it makes him feel better to call his nonsense wisdom."

Kristen pulled her hand away and looked at Willie, her eyes coming closer together, focusing on him. There was gunfire and shouting from behind the bar. Matt Dillon's voice cut through the jumble of noise and Willie turned away from Kristen to watch. Sally Quinlin was shouting encouragement and pounding his fist on the bar. Millard was placid, his great red girth floating steadily before him as he breathed.

"This place is a drag," Kristen said.

"Sure it is," Bucket said. "That's why we come here. You see, there is a fine principle of logic involved. First, we know that the Exeter



Hotel bar is boring Monday through Thursday nights. But, since we *know* it is boring, that means that we must not be boring people, because boring people cannot possibly know that they are boring." Bucket leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands confidently behind his head.

"I've heard stories about him," Kristen said to Willie.

"He has the weight of Chinese History on his side," Willie said. "That's why he's trying to grow that stupid moustache."

"I see," Kristen said. "I see everything but the moustache."

"Now you've hurt my feelings," Bucket said. "Someday you'll be sorry for that. You'll be proud to tell your grandchildren you knew the legendary Bucket Hawkins, Wise Man."

"He's just trying to pick you up," Willie said. He leaned closer, drawn by the damp heat Kristen still carried from the cloudy September night.

"Don't worry about it, Willie," Bucket said. "A Wise Man never gets a woman."

"What's he raving about now?" Kristen said.

"You see, she's already hung up on you."

"What's he talking about?"

"Sweetheart," Bucket said, pulling at her sleeve, "it's another piece of simple logic. A woman can spot a Wise Man a mile off. And, because she knows he's a Wise Man, she knows for certain what he's after." He stroked her arm.

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Kristen said, reaching for her scarf.

"You don't have to get hostile about it," Bucket said. "A young girl doesn't come wandering in here alone off the street without a pretty good idea of what she's getting into."

Willie watched Kristen knot the scarf under her chin. She seemed offended, but there was something about the sureness of her hands that said otherwise. Her fingers worked deliberately, as though they had made the same motion in the same circumstances many times. He knew the Exeter gossip well enough to be fairly certain she was soaring in new territory, but the steadiness was there, just the same.

"Only a fool can get a woman," Bucket said. "A fool doesn't let on what he's after, since he's too stupid to know. The woman thinks it was all her idea and it makes her feel better, like she wasn't tricked, or she's doing some poor dummy a favor. Fools are lucky people. I've had to learn to be satisfied with being a Wise Man."



Kristen was standing now, holding her arms tightly under her breasts. "Will you take me home?" she said to Willie. Just like that, she said it. "Will you take me home?" It was too wild and easy to pass on. You could chase ladies for years, come up empty, and this one said it all straight out: "Take me home."

Bucket followed them out into the street. "I guess I'll go back to the house and watch my moustache grow," he said.

"Why don't you," Kristen said. It was almost ten o'clock and the street was quiet and dark under the clouds. Her voice echoed off the brick walls and was absorbed by the low trees and humidity. In another time, the two young men and the woman could have been the Hart brothers and Miss Edna McLaughlin, who shot one between the eyes with a .22 caliber pistol and sent the other running for a doctor in fear of his life. But that was in the last century, and in front of the Baptist Church.

"Ease up some, Bucket," Willie said. He watched the slow smile spread across Bucket's pudgy face.

"Yeah," Bucket said. "I guess I'll go home alone. Again. You know, though, you prove my point about the great *Fools and Women* case." The smile turned into a kind of sweet glaze. "Have a nice drive."

Willie had taken a step toward him when the tavern door opened and Sally Quinlin fell outside.

"By God," Quinlin said, "we got 'em tonight." Quinlin hitched up his pants and rocked on his heels. "Me and old Dillon showed them sonsofbitches this week. There's no stopping us." He leaned against the bricks and massaged his teeth with the corner of a match book. "It ain't easy being Chief of Police and the whole force all by yourself."

"You should take some of Bucket Hawkins's Wise Man lessons," Kristen said. She was standing behind Quinlin and when he turned to her, Kristen put her hand over her mouth.

"Your daddy know you're here?" Quinlin said.

Kristen shrugged and her arm dropped to her side.

"These bums'll get you in big trouble." Quinlin pointed his thumb at Willie and Bucket Hawkins.

Willie scraped the cement with his heel. Things had turned sour with Bucket and now Quinlin was getting in the way. And what made it worse was that he knew Quinlin was right. You hate to admit that about Sally Quinlin, but Samuel Goreman's daughter is more trouble than you need. A car moved up the street behind Kristen, outlining the shadow of graceful legs through her cotton skirt.

"Sally," Bucket said, "I think you should get Hardwick here off the streets. He's a menace."

Quinlin stuck the matchbook in his shirt pocket and sucked at a tooth. He pushed himself off the side of the building and started pacing back and forth on the sidewalk between Willie and Kristen.

Bucket Hawkins folded his arms and said, "Matt Dillon would run the likes of Harwick out of town and blow his brains out if he didn't move fast enough."

"What are you talking about?" Willie said. "I live here."

"Now Sally, you know that's right," Bucket said.

"He's just sore because he made a fool out of himself," Willie said. "Why don't you beat it, Sally. You're wasting your time."

"She's out of your class, Digger," Bucket said.

Willie's teeth were chattering and as soon as he saw the slick smile return to Bucket's face, he grabbed his shirt and pushed him into a parked car. Out of the corner of his eye, Willie saw Quinlin tottering on the sidewalk, pistol in hand. Jesus, he thought, oh Jesus!

"Hold it right there!" Quinlin shouted.

Willie and Bucket stopped and stood very still, looking at Quinlin.

"I said hold it right there!" Quinlin screamed again.

"We're holding, we're holding, for Christ's sake," Bucket said. "Put the damned gun away."

Now, Quinlin was having real trouble with his legs. His baggy blue pants jiggled, as though full of small, quick animals. "Hold it right there!" Sally heaved the gun into the air and fired a shot.

Willie heard a sharp tick through the blast and the severed ends of a thick telephone cable dropped into the street.

"My God, he's killed the phone company," Bucket said.

Quinlin was maneuvering his gun hand again, when his head snapped forward and he slumped to the sidewalk. Kristen held a long board in both hands. "Poor Sally," she said.

By the time Kristen had thrown the board back into the alley, the men were all out of the tavern. They stood in a tight huddle around Sally Quinlin and muttered about the shot and the phone line and the general injustice of living in a world full of people who made loud noises in the middle of the night.

"I was on the phone to my wife," Dave Parker said.

"You don't like her anyway," Millard Dunson said. He turned to Willie. "What happened here?"

After Willie had gone over the story, Millard Dunson directed the



men as they carried Sally Quinlin back inside the tavern.

"You'd better get home," Millard said from the door. "For years and years Sally Quinlin has watched *Gunsmoke* on my television, then gone out and made his rounds. Most people know enough to stay out of his way."

"He was the one got in our way," Willie said.

"Doesn't matter. You know what it'll be like when he wakes up."

Bucket Hawkins was already in his car and backing away from the curb.

"Shouldn't we wait for the police?" Kristen asked.

"Good Lord," Millard said. "I'd think you'd done enough of that already. Sally's the one in trouble with the law. You've got trouble with your daddy. Both of you." Millard stepped back and the door swung shut.

"Looks like we're partners," Kristen said.

Willie turned and walked toward the old Pontiac and Kristen kept pace with him. When he got to the car, Willie climbed up and sat down on the hood and laughed. He leaned his back against the windshield and Kristen was beside him, laughing too. He put his arm under her shoulders and pulled her closer, feeling the scarf slide off and her hair clean and soft against his cheek. Above them, the trees jumped and their branches began to creak as the thick wind ripped around the edges of the buildings. Then, it started to rain and they got in the car.

## II.

"General Pemberton is having a bitter time of it tonight," Kristen said, pointing at the statue of the man who lost Vicksburg.

"I'll never understand," Willie said, "how Lieutenant General John Clifford Pemberton ended up a statue in Illinois." The car slowed and he looked out at the great bronze man who stood atop a block of gray marble and brandished his bronze sword at the rain. "He probably surrendered on a night like this," Willie said.

Kristen moved closer to him. "I feel cold," she said. "I know it's not cold, but I feel cold."

"It's the rain."

"I guess so. It sounds cold, so I feel cold."

"This old car will get us through," he said. "I've got faith in this car. She's driven me home on worse nights than this." He squinted along



the hood at the chrome Indian. "I'm telling you, this car's got instinct," Willie said. Instinct.

"I walked to the hotel," Kristen said. "Didn't think it would rain."

"Maybe you just didn't figure on walking home. Those things happen." He gave her a sidelong glance, then looked back at the Indian.

"Do you know where I live," Kristen said.

Willie nodded. "How do you figure I could live here all my life and not know a thing like that?" he said.

"Do you think Sally has come to yet?"

"Do horses have wings?"

"Only if they're flying horses," she said. "And stop being nasty."

"No, I don't think Sally has come to yet," Willie said. "You really put one on him." He laughed and rested his arm in her lap. "I'm not like Bucket Hawkins. I counted you for a nice girl."

"Thank you."

"What I can't understand is how you got so handy with a two-by-four. You swung that thing like a sailor."

"Yo-ho-ho," she said.

At the northeast corner of the square, Willie drove straight down Hastings, then turned right on Highway 110. All the lights were out at Estel Cowper's Texaco station, except for the Bardol sign Estel kept on for thieves, and the street seemed ordinary. Everybody by-passed Exeter on the new Federal highway, but 110 was still different because it could take you out of town. Poor Estel's nearly dead from lost business, always hunched over a flat tire or busted car when you stop in, crying about the lousy Feds and the lousy Goddamned freeway and nobody buys gas and him with three lousy kids to raise up on change from cigarettes and Pepsi-Cola. After two blocks, they passed a squat tarpaper building. Smoke, beaten down by rain, hung about the roof and walls like a dark fist.

"Emory's working tonight," Willie said. The two small windows were filled with an orange glow and steam leaked through one of the broken sections of glass. Emory Hardwick was the last living blacksmith in Exeter, Illinois.

"When I was little," Kristen said, "my friends and I would sneak over here and peek through the windows. We pretended there was a monster inside. Probably because of all the fire and sparks we saw."

"He's my uncle," Willie said.

"Oh . . . I'm sorry. For calling him a monster, I mean."

"It's OK," Willie said. "You could be right."

"You can't mean that. Not about family." She turned her head, keeping her eyes fastened on the blacksmith shop as he drove past. "Let's stop," Kristen said. "I want to stop and go inside."

"See the monster first hand?"

"Like looking under the bridge for trolls," Kristen said. She faced Willie and her smooth forehead seemed to glow, as if her skin had absorbed the orange heat of the forge simply by turning toward it on a dismal night.

"No."

"Why not? It's a perfectly natural thing to do. He's your uncle. Why shouldn't you stop in to say hello on your way home?"

"No." What else was there to say? It seemed impossible that she could not know about his grandfather and his brother Emory. Everybody in town knew they hadn't spoken for nearly fifty years. Her family had been involved, maybe even partly responsible. Ed Garvey was hanged and buried all these years now and you still might sit in Fletcher's or the Hotel and the old men would bend their faces low over coffee or drinks and look at each other through their brows and shake their heads, the way men do when bad things come up out of nowhere, come up sudden, like when an ice cube thaws and a pocket of frozen air squeezes out into bourbon and water and the sound surprises you because it's unexpected. Rotten dreams don't need an invitation and Kristen had to know that any contact he might have with Emory couldn't be as easy as just walking in to pay your respects on the way home.

"Listen," she said, "I sort of bailed you out back at the Hotel. Don't you think you owe me one?"

"If you're going to play it like that, then the hell with you," Willie said. He pulled the car to the curb in front of the abandoned grade school. "I never asked for a damned thing from you." Rain fell like buckshot on the car.

"So what? If I hadn't done it, they might have carried *you* off, or worse."

And what do you say to that? You try to avoid debts, but sometimes they're made for you. Willie studied the girl's face and he knew from the way her thinly parted lips stretched across her teeth that she would be one who would always collect.

"I want to go back," she said, smiling now, erasing that one quick, poisonous look.



Willie put the car in gear and pulled away from the curb. He circled around behind the school playground that was now filled with small shiny houses, and pulled into the dirt lot behind Emory Hardwick's shop.

Kristen was the first out of the car and her foot slipped as soon as it touched the ground. She fell back through the door and Willie reached over and caught her head.

"Watch out," he said. "You've got to be careful. It's the rain and all the old oil that's been leaked out around here." He got out and stepped quickly on the balls of his feet toward the door. "Get's like glass whenever there's water on it."

There was a close path through the towering heaps of junk. All around them the jagged parts of discarded machinery jutted up into the rain. Running to catch Willie, Kristen barked her shin on an old wagon axle which had long ago been placed carefully over two oil drums and since mounded over on one end with worn out pumps and engine blocks and indecipherable scraps of rusted sheet steel. The path was thick with chain links that were trampled into the rich, oily dirt, as though the survivors of a million ruined farms, ten million dried out wells and countless trips to and from town on crummy roads, the casualties of lives nobody could remember, sat in the rain and bled small square chain links onto the path, the one remaining sliver of clear real estate. The rain collected in small pools around the chain links and as they approached the open door, Willie could see Emory's forge burning in those cool puddles of rain.

Inside, Willie looked through the smoke and steam and saw his uncle standing at the forge, his back to the door. Emory held a large hammer poised above his head, then smashed it down on a piece of hot metal.

Willie wiped the rain from his face. "What are you working on tonight, old man?" he said.

"Steel," Emory said, without turning. "Nothing but steel. Good for the constitution."

The shop was even more crowded than the ground outside, with scrap reaching from floor to ceiling, so that if the tarpaper walls someday disappeared, it was unlikely that anybody inside would ever mark their passing. There was less rust inside, though, and you had to wonder what kind of strange system Emory had that determined what should be kept out of the weather and what could be consigned



to the elements.

"Do you remember me?" Kristen said. "I'm the little girl who used to throw rocks through the window and splash you with water from that big tank."

"Ah, missy, missy," Emory sighed, still close at his work. "You could be anybody in a skirt if that's all you got to remember you."

"I sometimes wore jeans."

"What a shame," Emory said, turning now to study her from under the turned up bill of his machinist's cap. "I'm a fair great blacksmith," he said to Willie, laughing, "but there's some things I can't fix, like pretty girls what wears pants. There's nothing I knew for a thing like that."

Emory dropped his hammer onto the dirt floor and tossed his thick, high-cuffed leather gloves onto the small greasy cot stashed behind a partition constructed of stacked tire rims.

"Kristen wanted to know what the inside of a real live blacksmith shop was like," Willie said.

"But it's home, just home," Emory said. "How do you like it?"

"It's very cozy," Kristen said, shifting her eyes from wall to wall. "Very cozy."

"I haven't done the cleaning yet today," Emory said sadly. The silver flecks in his heavy black pants and shirt sparkled in the firelight. "If I'd of known there was guests in tonight's prophecy, then I'd of strengthened up a bit. What's your name, dear?"

"Kristen Goreman."

"Goreman, ah, Goreman," Emory said, rubbing his hands on a faded red shop towel.

"She belongs to Samuel Goreman," Willie said. "His daughter."

"I see, I see," Emory said. "Well, you're really out and about tonight, aren't you, missy."

"You should see the way she handles a club," Willie said.

"If she's Samuel Goreman's daughter, then there's no surprise in that one," Emory said.

"You must get lonesome," Kristen said, "all shut up in here by yourself."

Emory laughed again and wiped the shop towel under his nose. "Used to be lots of people come by," he said. "Never got lonesome then. Just the other way around. Course, later, when I started this business with the gold, I discouraged them and it soon stopped."

"Gold," Kristen said.

Emory nodded. "Thirty, forty years ago, I got started trying to extract gold from scrap metal. That's how come there to be so much junk around here. I collected up all the stuff I could and now I got more junk than I can mine. Never found a lick of gold yet, though. Not a lick."

Willie walked to the forge and poked at the coals. "You remember," he said, "that time I sneaked down here out of school and we tried to melt down all those old combine parts and skim off any shiny stuff that came to the top?"

"Sure, sure. Looking for gold. That's all it was. I never told you. You got to watch out people finding things out about you. What'd everybody think if they knew I was running a gold mine in this place? I'd be in big trouble."

"People might think you were a little . . . odd," Kristen said.

"Odd, hell. Why, they'd be all over me like flies. Clean me out over night. You know how people is when things is tangled up with gold. Now, you two keep this quiet, hear?" Emory looked uneasily from Kristen to Willie. "Hear?"

"She won't talk," Willie said. "I'll see to it."

Willie stood beside the forge and scratched little designs in the caked floor with a poker. You could see that Emory was a man of business and that business didn't include young girls that came around late at night just to satisfy a whim. The light started to fade and Emory looked around at the fire and began worrying the red towel in his hands. When Willie was a boy, he had seen wonderous things take shape at the hands of Emory Hardwick, secret things that were drawn from the fire and wrought from steel, then turning slowly orange amid the sparks and the piercing ring of Emory's tools, then a dull silver-gray, the same color as the steam given off when you plunge them into cool water. He wanted to put his fingers on the old man's arm and ask him to make him something, make him a toy shovel or a knife and hold it always in the big pincers just above the fire, never hot enough to melt back into dumb, stupid metal, always with that faint orange glow that made the thing special, frozen at the very edge of being finished and new. Willie discovered Kristen's arm around his waist, shaking him.

"You OK?" Emory said.

"Sure. Fine."

"You looked a little funny there for a minute," Emory said.

"I was just thinking how close I come to getting shot tonight,"



Willie said, lowering his head and flexing his back. "It was pretty close, wasn't it," he said to Kristen.

"We'd better go," she said.

"Curiosity satisfied?" Emory said.

Kristen smiled and touched the old man's shirt. "Curiosity satisfied," she said. "I'm sorry we bothered you."

"What's the bother?" Emory said. "Pretty girl's never a bother." He stuck the towel into his hip pocket and guided them to the door. A cold draft whipped Kristen's skirt and the rain was blown level with the junk outside. Wind swirled in the doorway and they were touched for a moment by a fine mist. "Goodbye," Emory said.

Inside the car, Willie switched on the ignition and ground the engine, but nothing happened. The cylinders cranked and whined and refused to catch. "Come on, Chief," Willie said, first looking ahead at the chrome Indian, then tapping his forehead on the steering wheel. "Come on, I don't need trouble from you."

"Some car," Kristen said.

Willie stopped, looked at her for an instant, and tried the ignition again. Nothing.

"I think your car has finally come home to rest," Kristen said, waving her arms at the junkyard.

"The problem is I want to go home and rest," Willie said.

"Just leave it. You can walk me home and I'll get a car and drive you."

"I'm afraid if I leave it here, Emory'll have it stripped down for gold by morning," Willie said.

"No," she said. "Anybody can see there's no gold in this car." Kristen got out and started walking.

Together, they left Emory's place and struck out through the rain for Kristen's house. "I feel like a commando," Willie said. He looked back at the shop and saw Emory standing at the window, laughing, his arms braced on the sill above his head, as though he might be concealing a hammer, a huge dull sledge that had to be lifted with both hands and in a flash Emory's shoulders and back would double over and hammer the rain, seal off the way back to the car and the shop, the warm dry fire.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Kristen asked, struggling against the wind.

"We just talked to one," Willie said.



"I think there are ghosts all around us," Kristen said. "See them? There, in those bushes. It's a big ghost in a black coat. He's smoking a cigarette in the rain and not getting wet. You see him?"

"Walk faster."

"I like the rain. I'm not cold anymore."

"Faster."

"There's another one. There, on the Janson's porch swing. This time it's a woman. She's wearing a long white dress and holding one of those big fans. Look! It's made out of pink ostrich feathers and now she's hiding her face behind it."

Soon, they were running, their feet clattering on the wet cement. The late summer trees bent low under the storm and when the rain eased up, there was only the sound of water dripping from leaf to leaf. When they reached Kristen's house, Willie would stand with her on the step. Maybe he would kiss her, or maybe just shake his head, say goodnight and leave. He didn't want her to drive him home. She'd given him enough already. A ride home was a little thing, compared with the rest, but you have to stop sooner or later. The wind was cold now, following after the rain, and Willie's clothes clung to him like slabs of mud.

"You never saw the ghosts, did you?" Kristen asked.

"Yes. I saw them."

"I wonder who they were."

"It doesn't matter. Once you're dead, it doesn't matter who you were. You can sit on a porch or smoke a dry cigarette in the rain and it doesn't make any difference at all who you are."

### III.

It took a long time to walk six miles and even though the rain had stopped, the air hung about Willie's shoulders in a cold, sticky film. There were occasional gusts of wind that shredded the clouds, exposing the countryside to moonlight. Everything smelled cold and new, like fresh meat.

*You just as well laugh as cry*, Emory used to say and that seemed a reasonable way to look at things. Willie hadn't walked home since he was in school, one day after Miss Brunel told him about French influence in this part of Illinois, sitting saucily on the edge of her desk, speaking in that saucy little voice about Marquette, LaSalle, Joliet, seventeenth century explorers.

"I heard of Joliet," Skid Johnson said that day. "That's where the

state pen's at." Everybody laughed and Miss Brunel placed her right hand on the desk, locked the elbow and leaned on it. Willie's eyes traced the fine blue veins up toward her shoulder and when she reached across with the other hand and gently touched herself on the inside of her arm, Willie rubbed a thumb over his own calloused fingers and tried to imagine skin that soft, skin that ready to move.

"You can also see the French influence in one of the place names around Exeter," Miss Brunel said. "It's the creek. Mauvaisterre Creek." She pronounced it *Movay-tare*, saying the *r* real funny, like something struck in the back of her throat.

"I told her *star*," Willie said now, *Movis-star*, sounding out the name like he'd always heard it spoken. He smelled of dirt and sweat that afternoon in Miss Brunel's class, recognized his own smell against the sweet air filtering through the tulip tree alongside the window.

"When translated," Miss Brunel said. "Mauvaisterre means bad earth, or sick ground. I can't imagine why, though. Everything around here is so lush. I'm really taken by your beautiful farms and woods and everything. Maybe the English knew something when they corrupted the word into *star*."

Saucy St. Louis woman, she didn't know anything. Willie walked faster, drawing near the Crawford place. The moonlight was steady now and ahead he could see where the country dropped off and began to roll down toward the creek. White heavy mist gathered in the hollows and you couldn't know from here how rough the land was. The mist gleamed like a white carpet and it looked as though the level ground went on forever and you could walk all night and never find that muddy ditch called Mauvaisterre. You might hear the water spill over an occasional stone, but it would be far below you as you stepped easily atop the clean mist.

Walking past the dark Crawford house, Willie again heard Darrall's crutches complain as he climbed to his feet that afternoon with Miss Brunel. Willie was at her desk. "I didn't mean to be smart," he said.

"It doesn't matter what your intentions were," voice the only cool thing in the room.

"I want to learn, but there's things I know about already, like that creek. Things I've got to get out."

"Not at my expense."

"Come on, Willie," Darrall said from the door. "You can walk it



maybe, but I can't." He thumped the rubber tip of a crutch on the floor. "Let's go. We'll miss the bus."

"You're from the city," Willie told her. And here he was, all grown up now and still talking to a saucy St. Louis woman on a dark road. The Crawford house seemed to groan at the moon as he went by. Old Lady Crawford stood one morning years ago on the porch, waving Darrall's two wooden crutches at him, screaming, you git, Digger Hardwick, git, Darrall's gone for good now and you never come back, never if your life depended on it set foot on this property, we'll bury our own. We don't need you. And through the rain-streaked sky, Willie could still see the big white Buick that Marlene, Darrall's mother, had driven down from Chicago. The Buick was blotched with dust and sat under a tree, looking rich and sad, out of place on that good, level farm.

Well, Miss Brunel had run off with some stringer on the stockcar racing circuit and Marlene went back to Chicago and Willie had his own saucy woman now. God knows what you do with a woman like that, Kristen wasn't the kind you could ignore. The mist was closer now and the road began to drop off slightly. He should have taken the ride she offered, suddenly finding himself hip-deep in mist, each step submerging him more into the white darkness. He could barely make out the savage oaks along the road, and not at all the thickets. Nothing sounded alive, no animals darted through the brush, and soon the iron bones of Pulling's Bridge surprised him out of the bright fog. His steps boomed on the thick, warped planks. Burl waited on the other side, waited alone in the old house, probably dreaming up some new scheme to give Willie another pain in the butt. Not that he needed anything new for that. Willie stopped, and in the stillness, he heard the creek.

Willie couldn't count the times he'd seen the water under this bridge. He sat and dangled his feet over the edge of the planks and looked down. A giant, white pit opened below him and the water could have been a few inches or miles away. Nobody could find you in weather like this. Bucket Hawkins couldn't find you and drive you crazy. The ghost of Darrall Crawford couldn't find you. Sally Quinlin couldn't put you in jail or pull a gun on you. And Burl couldn't eat away at you with anymore of those stories. You could rest here for centuries and get rock solid drunk on the weather and the sound of water unseen, unviolated as it slipped past under the white sheet of fog.



Gone.

The white sheet tipped it. That was one of the old man's stories and as Willie sat on the bridge, it was as though the creek recited it back to him.

\* \* \*

It was terrible dry ten years ago and Willie had been walking in the dust along the road and his stomach still churned from the trouble with Miss Brunel. Willie rounded the last curve and sat down at the end of the row of spirea bushes and put his shoes and socks back on. He watched Burl moving in and out of the barn. He watched the house, two stories of clapboard, long front room on the ground floor made of logs, old, veneered over, hill steepening toward the barn. The old man worked in and out of the barn that pitched awkwardly toward the Mauvaisterre and, depending on how you looked at it, the ridge dropped more under the weight of the barn, or the barn conformed to the shape of the land. The old man was latching up the long sliding door on the barn and that was good. Willie didn't like chores, though he had learned to bear them, learned that you put your mind to something else, pretend it's a famous cowboy stumbling against the bulk of hay bales, and you're not stumbling at all, you're swaggering. You make the hogs an invading army and pick them off one by one with grenades, ears of corn. The old man couldn't know the rules of pretend. A woman might understand how the rules worked, but there hadn't been a woman at the house for a long time now. Sometimes you worry about no woman and how things got that way. And you worry that fourteen is too old for games, anyhow.

The poppies were matted on the ground this time of year and Willie could see the stones, some an off-white, some nearly brown, splashed across the hill. The stones weren't organized in any particular way. It was as though the graveyard started by accident, by surprise, like the Hardwicks had carried their dead up the hill until they got tired, set the coffin down and dug a hole on the spot. That was how he and Burl buried Sarah, his grandmother, at least as far as he could remember. He often set little traps for the details of that lost time, as if they could be captured like a fox and, once captured, killed and mounted and studied, maybe never understood, but at least brought to earth and touched. Things like that, though, you have to close on from downwind and sometimes it took a long time and sometimes it didn't

work out at all. Willie got up and trotted down to meet the old man.

"Sorry I'm late," Willie said.

"No you're not. No sense adding a lie to it." Burl didn't look at him. A frog croaked from the mud along the creek and Burl pulled off his yellow cotton gloves and stuck them inside his shirt. He rolled down his sleeves over white, stringy arms and walked away, swinging red bony hands loosely at the ends of his plaid shirt, his pants cuffs dragging the ground.

"Missed the bus," Willie said.

"You're all the help I got," Burl said. "If you can't hold up to that, it's OK by me."

Willie shook his head. That's the way he works you. Makes like he doesn't care a damn. Sneaks up on you like that.

Burl stopped halfway to the house and sat on the well-top. He pulled off his cap and worked the pump handle a long time until he got water. Then, he stuck his white, bald head under the spigot and let the water spill over him. And, as he pumped with one hand, he rubbed the other against his face, blowing loudly to keep the water out of his nose. The old, loose skin bunched up at the leading edge of his hand. Finally, he stopped and sat up and looked at the boy. Water trickled from his stubbled chin in a lean, gray thread and splattered on his shirt front.

"They was this fella once," Burl Hardwick said. "This was way back after the Great War in France, back when Emory was still to home." Burl slumped back against the cast iron pump. That's always the answer. You tell a story. If this man, this old man with bad teeth that never smile, old fool too closed off from everybody even to be labeled criminal, when the crime had been not alone against his dead wife, but against a boy who still had to be around other people, if this old man had been Noah, the whole world would have sunk then and there because he took time out to tell the animals a story about another rain storm he'd seen years earlier. Emory, he'd said. The name sounded hollow and dry rolling off his grandfather's tongue.

"They was this fella," Burl Hardwick said again. He cocked his head, as though listening for something far off. "Dave Kinison hired him off the road to work around the place."

Willie crouched in the dust. He could run away and hide out in the brush until after dark, when the old man would maybe be too tired or have forgotten. He could draw figures with his fingers in the yellow dust, make up a game in his head. He could do anything. Willie sat in



the dust and watched the old man's mouth move. Emory. That was the barb on the hook.

*Dave Kinison's family'd been around here almost as long as ours and they lived out on the flat about halfway between Old Lady Crawford's and town. Dave had a sister that married and moved away and him and the wife and daughter lived alone on the place. Cora, the wife, always seemed a cold woman, but she was a few years older than me and I never knew her more than to wave when I went by. The little girl was named Beatrice, about fourteen or fifteen, and not at all like her mother.*

*This fella was named Ed Garvey and nobody thought much about it when Kinison hired him on. Garvey was around town off and on for a couple of years and never got much except shoveling coal at the railway yards and sweeping out stores for whiskey money. It was Prohibition then, but Garvey always managed to turn a drink, as most of us did.*

*Dave Kinison finally took him on at wheat cutting time and I guess Garvey thought he'd at least get fed good, even if the work was harder than he was used to at the yards and everybody knew Kinison'd never allow him to lay up drunk on whiskey, which Garvey was prone to do. Seemed he had it pretty good as it was, so the town never understood why he'd want to move out to Kinison's, even for meals. She couldn't of been that good at the stove and like I said, there wasn't much else in her.*

*This happened in 1921 and those had been in France were of course home, but everybody was still kind of edgy having them around. I mean, we were glad they was back, and they were glad, too, but there was something different about them even then, like they'd been made a different shape and wouldn't quite fit back into the way the rest of us was. And, of course, some didn't come back, which made for a strain with their folks. We all understood — but what can you do? — so we kept up with being glad the war was over. And, I suppose most of us was.*

*Anyhow, Dave Kinison had this Garvey working for him that summer and one Friday I was down to the courthouse about the taxes or something and Kinison comes in dragging Garvey by his shirt collar and carrying two jars of bootleg whiskey under his arm. Kinison hauls his load into the Sheriff's Office and says, I've caught*



*this man drinking in my barn and I want him in jail.*

*Henry Evans was Sheriff during that time and he says, Well, Dave, I'll do that, but it'd help if we knew where the whiskey come from.*

*Kinison says he don't know and don't care, all he wants is Ed Garvey behind bars and out of his hair. That's what Henry Evans does and Kinison takes off for home lke there was a wild animal after him.*

*This was in July and the jail then was a cell in the Sheriff's Office in the basement of the courthouse, like it is now still. Henry Evans locks old Garvey up and says, Well, looks like there'll have to be a trial and I'm sorry for it. I still take a drink myself just like most men, except I suppose Dave Kinison. Then, he locks them two jars of whiskey up in the safe for evidence.*

*What we ought to do, I says, is drink that whiskey and to hell with Dave Kinison.*

*Henry Evans laughs and says, That's right, and then Garvey laughs too and says, You know, that man found me in a whorehouse up in Peoria three years ago and told me he'd pay me a thousand dollars to go in the army for him.*

*All of a sudden me and Henry Evans wasn't laughing anymore and Garvey just hung there from the inside of the bars, shaking his head like he can't either believe what he's just told us, then laughing like a man who's just fired his last bullet at a wolf on a dark night. I told him, Garvey says, that's a lot of money, but he don't care, he tells me, because he's got a farm he's getting rich off of from the war and a little girl and he can't afford to take off for no Goddamned army and would I go for a thousand dollars.*

*I ask him if he went.*

*Sure I went, Garvey says, spent part of the money for another turn that very same night. Garvey laughs again, then says, You know, I still would like to get used to brocade walls and gentle ladies. But that Cora Kinison's a hard woman and I run out of money before I ever got to France. That's how come me to be here in Exeter. He winks, then says, You know, Kinison don't like having me around a little bit. Garvey scratches his head and goes and sits on the bunk.*

*Well, Garvey cools his heels in jail that weekend and when Henry Evans opens the safe on Monday morning, there's nothing left of the evidence but pieces of broken glass. I figure that whiskey was a little green and it got so hot in that safe it blew up before Ed Garvey or me or Henry Evans got a chance to try and kill ourselves with it. There*

was nothing left but to turn Garvey out and that's exactly what Henry Evans did.

Garvey went back to work for Kinison and it weren't a week before Kinison's little girl was found violated and drowned in a stock tank. Garvey was the one discovered little Beatrice and he was in big trouble from the start.

Me and Emory went to town as soon as we heard and there was a big crowd of men at the jail. Kinison and his wife were staying over at the Hotel, people said because they were too broke up to handle going back to their farm for a few days, and Henry Evans had plenty on his hands trying to keep everybody calm down to the jail. You could of lit a match just holding it up to the air.

James G. Goreman, who was a lawyer and Samuel Goreman's father, was there, dressed in a light tweed suit with a vest and a heavy gold watch chain and fob that shimmered and caught the light and the heat as he stood on the basement step of the courthouse and held up his arms at the crowd.

Men, James G. Goreman says, I know there has been a terrible outrage and we all want justice for that little girl who met with such a terrible end. Many of us here were told as children about popular justice at the hands of those who settled this town. Men, I know we want that kind of justice, but that was before the law. That time is past.

Goreman took off his hat and held it behind his back. Men, he says, we all live under the law and the law is a patient thing. The man inside this jail will get no less than his kind deserve if only we are patient with the law.

Now, Goreman and Kinison were pals and this kind of talk coming from Goreman took a strong hold of people. If Goreman could wait out the law in the course of justice for his friend's daughter, then I guess most of the men at the jail felt they could too, because they settled down. Some even went home. Me and Emory stayed and waited to see what else might happen. Goreman left, too, and when he walked by us, Emory stands up and tells him that was a good speech.

Thank you, James G. Goreman says.

Yes sir, Emory says, a real fine speech.

Thank you, Goreman says again, then, Please excuse me. I must go to the hotel and see how the Kinisons are bearing up. This has been a terrible tragedy for them.

It surely has, Emory says and sits down again.



*I was keeping track of time by the clock on top of the courthouse and about seven that evening some of the wives brought baskets of food down to their men and the men shared it with those of us didn't have any. We sat there on the grass and ate and smoked and talked and now and again there'd be a car go by making a lot of noise and some of the men would stand up and shout something about what had happened, what was going on there at the jail, or maybe calling out to ask if the folks had heard any news of the Kinisons from the hotel. When that happened, Henry Evans's face would show up inside the jailhouse window, checking to make sure nothing was getting stirred up. I expect poor Henry was pretty shaky in them hours, with all of us outside and him in there with a man supposed to be a killer, a man me and Henry'd almost shared a drink with right there in the jail just a few days before all of this.*

*Later on it got dusk and me and Emory was still sitting close-by the street, so I guess maybe we was the first ones heard it. At first I thought it was something funny with the sun going down, then I see this light flickering not like the sun at all along the side wall of the bank.*

*I stand up and so does Emory and then the cars, four of them, swing out of the alley and I see they're full of men and more men hanging on the fenders. They're all wearing sheets and hoods and that funny light's coming from torches.*

*We better clear out, I says to Emory.*

*No, he says and pulls a handkerchief out and mops away the sweat along the back of his neck. No. His voice has a kind of catch in it. We can't go now, he says and his feet sort of move around inside his tracks.*

*All four cars pulled over to the curb and the men climbed down. I'd heard talk they was working in the County and I should of been ready for them — but how can you? I remember there was a sticky breeze got up at sundown and the sheets clung to the fronts of the men when they walked through the crowd up to the jail and the torchlight played across everybody's faces.*

*Pretty quick everybody got loud and one of the covered-up things threw a torch inside the jail and I could see Henry Evans trying to put the fire out. That was when they broke down the door. I heard shouting from inside and shortly they come out with Garvey and start off on foot down Prairie Street toward the park, moving right past me, jostling me around. But I stayed put. I was the last living man*



*there at the jail, for it turned out Henry Evans had got killed, got his head smashed on the bars when they busted through the door and somebody kicked him in the ribs and threw him out of the way. I saw it all.*

*There was never no public evidence against Garvey that I heard of. I remember looking over at the hotel while all this was going on and I see a shadow standing in one of the windows. And I remember one of them Kluxers brushing past me on tweed legs and black shoes about as shiny as that gold watch, so shiny you could count the torches in them.*

*I stand there awhile and the noise is carried back heavy on the wind and the close air. Pretty soon it gets too quiet and I know they're done. I look down and there's Emory's sweat-stained handkerchief spread out all white there on the grass. The shadow's gone from the window and a few days later Dave Kinison ups and shoots himself in the head. His wife moves off shortly after that and just leaves the farm for whoever wants it. But nobody does. Who would. You've seen it. Would you want that farm?*

\* \* \*

Shortly after the lynching somebody burned down the Kinison house and all the outbuildings. Willie sat swinging his feet over the edge of the bridge and stared off into the fog. The only thing left of the Kinison place was a grove of maples that sat now in the middle of a field and weeds grew thick around the trees so that you had to walk out into them before you could see the caved-in brick walls of the basement. And if you explored that ruined pit you might find warped pieces of metal, like a fork or a spoon, other utensils, or a shard of broken glass, maybe brass hardware that had the woodwork burned off.

The Hardwick place was about three hundred yards on past the bridge. Willie could cover that distance in a short time and when he went inside, the old man would be waiting under a single lamp, still sitting there in his work clothes, older than when he'd told the Ed Garvey story, harder, mouth pinched, expectant, his eyes less patient these days. His fingers would be laced in rough ridges across his stomach, looking tough, scarred, like a field you've planted when the ground's too wet and you know the seed will rot, crop turn out bad,

but still a crop. Burl would turn when he heard the door and this time the mouth would smile in a funny way as he asked, "Where you been?" and smile wider still when Willie is unable to answer.

*from Mauvaisterre*

## YOUR WINTER VISIT

Teeth around this house,  
the icicles thin, lessen to two feet.  
I laugh in the kitchen,  
fold the dough over and over

while you talk, watch me fold.  
I can be objective: the end  
of a long winter, I can be  
in the other room where the cold

comes in through a crack, dogs  
huddled together. Soon even they  
will go in to lie near you,  
the stove. I pound it

into the table, fingernails  
crusted white, slide it into  
the over, notice the sun I say  
is good floods the front yard.

But you say tonight it is supposed  
to freeze again, and after we eat  
the bread, before you have to leave,  
after the teeth have time to sharpen,

let's take a walk on ice.



## **JULY 18TH, THE OLD HOUSE, AND BIRDS**

It's a sad night because you're listening  
on top of the pickup to the birds.  
There's no help for you out there,

your body getting warm from the engine  
that was just shut off. I can't  
tell you what to do; I can only look  
at the ivy going wild from all the new sun.  
Maybe you're all right just sitting there

looking at the old barn. Maybe you don't  
feel as sad now listening. It might be good

to let night open around you with fireflies,  
chamomile, all summer never losing its smell.  
And you'll wait listening to the birds

that sing for some reason, out there among  
the ripening blackberries, the bordering,

bordering black willows that are dumb  
in this dead heat of summer.

## THE OLD COUNTRY

*for Aunt Mary*

You are still in the picture, your arm  
about Joshka. Carlji shows you off, his son,  
his car. Perushka holds up her prize chicken

she has just killed for you. Your white teeth  
stand out from this farm in Androshfar.  
Always since your parents died

you wanted to visit their backyards, the country  
where people say their last names first,  
the vineyard your father gave up to come to

a better country. You wanted to see  
where your mother milked her own cow,  
to imagine the udder becoming her fingers,

to see the kitchen where she learned  
to grind the poppy seeds. Where they fell in love.  
It was far from the Danube. You went

and found those geese that knowingly  
filed by their back gates. Almost  
all of it was there. You accepted the lilac water,

a hand-embroidered pillow. On our way home  
you took the polincka, that strong whiskey  
your father always said was good

for the soul, and poured it down  
a hotel sink. I am in the picture, too,  
standing under the chicken. I hold

a glass of red wine out to the camera.  
Puzzled, I am looking  
at you.



## THE LANDSCAPE NEAR A RESTHOME

The long afternoon wanes.  
The color-bruised sky,  
loose in its frame,  
shifts across farm fields.  
Again today Grandmother rests,  
her thin lids close at last.  
She knows how long there is  
to breathe the evening air.  
Grandfather gambles in her dream,  
whiskey-brown hands pushing everything across.

If only she could have seen  
how different today has been—  
black trees holding their limbs  
in phosphorescent green,  
blood tulips limp, deepening  
in shadows stretched across lawns.  
She speaks and her breath drifts in the warm air.  
A gold eye appears in a cloud.  
Waking, she sees its rays enter her room,  
like showers beginning over coal-black fields.

## MEMORY OF A SKELETON

*Chicago—The skeletons  
of a man and a woman,  
wearing winter clothing,  
were found in a luxury car  
parked in a garage on the South Side.*

In the moment your hair  
came through exhaust I was  
red like the whole garage,  
tail light red that locks  
a stare—say the first time I stood  
changing a tire on the freeway  
I held my finger up to see  
that red come through—then  
your face drifted down angelic.

This was no dream:  
my fur coat warm as blood  
and you getting in beside me,  
sending that tremor through  
my legs, so good it made me open  
for more air. You asked  
what's wrong but there was nothing;  
I had only been waiting too long.  
You asked again  
slower, your lips sanguine,  
eyes gone liquid. Just then  
it must have been the best.

Oh your skin fell away like petals  
in the long winter. I missed  
the music of  
the car and your careless voice.  
When they finally came, letting in  
that white blast of light,

they were years late, they  
found us laughing forever,  
our heads thrown back  
against the cushioned seat.



FOR ED HARKNESS LOST IN A CONTRIBUTOR'S  
NOTE IN THE *Quarterly West*

Maybe you wrote too near the vanishing point  
and that coyote cover serenading  
the moon is your mourner. Did you trip  
on a mismatched foot,  
fall over the western edge mapmakers took  
away into Pacific cold  
like the sad mad rest of us grieving?

Ed, we know you're in there. Come clean  
or we'll shoot for the moon. We follow  
the faintly criminal  
cast of your poems. You can't trust  
these underworld types, their masks and their  
patsies. We know all about your hearing  
loss. Didn't Beethoven deaf hang around till 80?

I'm sorry I wrote asking for those books of mine  
you didn't borrow. It's OK if you keep them.  
Just make things right on the planet. Take over  
the word, dead or alive. I favor  
a dim religious light, myself  
stoking the furnace with coffee, stalking your *eyelost*  
*wind* with trained police dogs.

I've staked out the P. O. and the Little Mags,  
tacked WANTED all over town. Ed, this is the dead  
letter office in sheep's clothing,  
Washington on the lam, code perfect, every page  
bleeding into the gutter  
waiting the new moon of the next issue.  
Forget that fine chap

book stuff. All of us love you.  
Send the regular contributor's  
poems. Here's 50 moons of reward.

## **NORTH/SOUTH**

Direction starts out wherever it leads.  
The ducks find their way  
Back. Sitting here on a rocky hillside  
Above the city, I unpack my lunch  
Like a light fixture  
And watch, tired, almost there.

The ducks roam the gray sky  
At home. I see them as racing shells,  
All those oarsmen! And the deep marshgrass  
Like a northern country . . .

Further down, a broken sawhorse collapses  
Into an upper case 'M'.  
Two bands of ducks pass, almost touching.

I hold up my brown paper sack:  
60 watts. Along the valley  
A thousand doors open on darkened rooms  
As I bite into the bright bulb  
    of a plum.

## THE WHIRL

Part of a slideshow, we ride standing  
Through the summer air, strapped  
In our separate spaces, bathed by a roving

Searchlight. Image after image of the city,  
The river, the otherwise unfocused  
Houses projects from the billion images

Held behind our brows. But the scenes  
Flash past so rapidly on the star-swirled  
Screen, we cannot hope to raise

A weightless hand in time to point out  
The particular place, upriver perhaps,  
Where we had been once or would like to go.



## ISLAND

The chain drops through transparent bursts of tide;  
His anchor rests between the inlets at a full cafe;  
Only thin trees come down to violets in a window ledge.

The hull he leaves for foreigners, partly burned  
And shining in the depths. Downstairs  
He entertains the sand with stories of his father

Who loved birds and tattooed a lark on his arm.  
The cave where at five he agreed  
To show himself to little girls has grown.

It is no longer their expecting eyes making him alone.  
It is not epiphanies of silent dancers who  
Sit down wondering if they are friends.

He confides to her that he has landed —  
While she sleeps. The island is his own; the trucks  
Deposit workers at their stations in the fields;

Men who never loved circle his fire;  
The surf brushes a kitchenette where  
A girl puts on the gas and waits.

He opens his hand and the lark is dead.  
The sound of clapping shuts off; only  
Wind comes up the inlet,

Whipping the flame,  
Finding holes in the forest,  
Blowing fine drifts over his legs.

## **SPRUCE**

What lucky chance it is  
that brings you and I together  
this night before you leave.  
Inside the house my friends  
huddle together, drinking  
and laughter. Out here you  
watch a tall spruce.  
The cars shooting by  
need to get somewhere,  
the foggy moon curling around us  
like a shrimp. I want to tell you  
the whole story. What comes out  
is fog.

Today I took a walk. Then I tore up  
scraps of old letters I should have saved.  
Then I walked again. Dog down the street  
limps oddly from the thud with a car,  
the trees that used to groan in storms  
now broken into firewood. Today I  
gracefully stopped running from something.  
Trying to see what that feels like.

And now you will go. Always  
a different town and you  
always lovely. In the top  
of every spruce you pass by  
a man with a patch over his eye  
will be sitting, watching you

as best he can. You'll wave  
as you walk, always away. Past  
the red dirt, the stray cat and  
ditch flowers. And I will be here  
in my yard, thinking of you. My cat  
and I will sit and talk about  
the silly world.

*for Maret*



## GETTING MARRIED IN SMELTERVILLE

After honeymoon  
we pass that sad porch one  
last time. Flies swimming  
in lemonade, whine of the love  
swing, fists of sparrows in lilac.  
Next door, a man whose wife died  
lets his grass grow up to heaven.  
Far off at a ballgame, foul smoke  
of coal and smell of popcorn. And  
the dreamy river pours its lovely  
catfish out of the sac. This is our  
town and we are off. Everybody  
loves a runaway.

The man on the porch  
doesn't wave when we wave. He  
is having a dream. In the dream  
he drives to work, trees leaning  
against houses, pushing them over.  
Every puddle in the darkness looks  
like a dead cat. At work one man wears  
the same hat and chews his gum. The lady  
next to him, wanted in five states.  
A friend with a heart attack sweeps the floor.  
Someone calls the wife, "Of course I'll see  
you tonight, it's routine."

Inside the dream, one night  
of dream. The man jolts up.  
Inside himself he hears the laugh  
of drunk kids, fiddling with his Ford.  
He runs out naked with a hammer. He throws  
it hard at the getaway car, deep in the  
reflection of himself. Standing where he  
stands, the way the world is, in moonlight.  
And you and I this afternoon wave again

at the man. We whistle what is lovable in  
our hands, around waists and in the air.  
Today as we leave, that man on the porch  
is the Best Man.

*for Wendy*





## IN THE NEW WORLD

Even then he seemed ancient, a mythical itinerant who arrived by train to spend the summer. What remains is a mosaic. A short man with large, enfolding hands who ate raw fish while I watched from the willow tree. A man whose single passion was to conquer, a joyless, stern, work-hardened man whose strange tongue I could not fathom.

Ensti Maallinen. He arrived in search of work in 1904 and how he found his way to southwestern Wyoming and the coal mines can only be guessed. Perhaps he was in the company of men who heard there was work in that land. Someone proffered the ticket, he paid currency he did not know the worth of and soon he was there, siderailed in a dry, hot country so unlike the swampland he had come from that he felt newly terrestrial.

A man who paid his dues. At midnight he would get up to cough phlegm from lungs riddled with coal dust. Embedded in his cheeks and forehead were specks of rock. He worked as a blacksmith, a man with a trade when he was not sinking charges in the mine. Then there was an explosion. A ceiling fell in. He was trapped seventy-eight hours underground in what became a grave for men whose luck had run out. A militant in his day, he was paid in full to the I.W.W. His last contribution was in 1929, and even now when the man no longer lives, the labour newspaper arrives in the mail to keep his ghost informed that the Union is still strong.

The tale. He fled eastern Finland rather than being recruited into the Russian army. He came to America where he worked hard, saved his money and married. He returned to Finland where two children were born and then, dissatisfied with his luck, where he lived in the city, in Helsinki, he came back with his family to the States, to Wyoming and the coal mines. The third child, my father, was the first Maallinen to be born in the new world.

In the family portrait my grandfather looks a handsome man. Doubtlessly strong. His hands rest like huge ornaments on his knees as he sits in the straightback chair with his family around him. Three children: a dark-haired girl, a tall, ungainly son and a tow-headed boy in knee britches. The wife, my grandmother. She had heavy, bovine features and the husky build of a peasant, but she was kind, you get that feeling. I never knew her. She died three days after I was born.

But the tale. He was an enterprising man and a good provider. Besides working in the mine he ran a small dairy and worked as a bartender in a saloon. It was said that he could use his massive fists if provoked and once he nearly beat a man to death. Or so the tale goes. I have the *puukko* he carried sheathed on his belt: a deadly, fine instrument that was honed to sting like a thistle.

That first trip to the Northwest. We picked him up at the railroad station in Seattle. He had one suitcase and a valise. And he was old. He seemed ancient, as though dust had permanently settled on his features. A stranger. I kept my distance. And he kept his.

"Call him *vaari*," my father said. "Grandpa."

My mother balked. She was an O'Connel. She had black, lustrous hair and needle features, and she didn't approve of her children fraternizing with the foreign and unfamiliar. I was two years younger than my sister and my brother was still riding my mother's hip. Her face became suspicious whenever Finnish was spoken in the house.

"What are they saying, mother?"

"It's idiot-talk. Don't listen. It doesn't mean anything."

My grandfather cleared the land. Cut trees and cleared the land. "I bring down light," he said. "Not enough light on this house."

The five acres. My father couldn't have made the down payment without my grandfather's help. Call it an advance against inheritance, anyway my grandfather had legitimate claim on the woods. He took over as though master. He determined which trees would fall and he would have fallen them outward to the horizons of the property had he not been pushing sixty. My father worked as a civil engineer in Seattle, he would leave the house early in the morning and arrive back late at night, in a '39 Plymouth we brush painted one summer to forestall rust. My father could devote little time to decimating the woods and, therefore, the woods survived, although sorely depleted.

But the woods. To my sister and me it seemed endless, thick forest. Bears came out of it to topple the garbage can, deer emerged to nibble at the garden and once there was a wolf. I can remember being roused to witness that gaunt apparition sitting in the snow looking into our windows. My father pitched food, but the wolf, an arrogant fellow, simply watched it drop in the snow. After sitting a while he got up and walked away, past the chicken house with the hens locked securely inside, along the path leading to a neighbor and forever out of our sight.

The house, a cottage. A pre-manufactured, easy-to-assemble



cracker box my father ordered through the catalogue. Friends gathered to raise it. The sections bolted together and in two days it was done, all except for tarpapering the roof. My father was laying the patio when I made my final thrust into the world. He will relive that moment with my mother. My mother was impatient to go because her water had broken, but my father, a meticulous man who sought perfection in small things, was determined to rake and smooth the concrete before it hardened.

It was to this outpost that my grandfather came with his traditions, his peculiarities and his foreign tongue. I can remember him climbing out of the car and stretching. The first thing he remarked was his fatigue and his need of a sauna. There was no sauna, my father informed him. But there was a tub. A tub would get you clean. My grandfather was indignant. A sauna must be built. The next day he started work on it. He was a good carpenter in addition to his other skills. He built the sauna to stand against time. A good, concrete floor on good hardpan. Walls with studs every sixteen inches. A firebox made of wrought iron, a metal ring to enclose rocks. When the sauna was done we dug two tremendous holes outside the door and filled them with sod and chicken manure before planting birch trees.

"For the future," my father translated. My mother would have nothing to do with the sauna. Only heathens went in for such practices. Only uncivilized people. Only Finns. She would continue to bathe in a tub, thank you. And so would the children.

"You're letting your blarney get the best of you," my father said.

"That might be so, but I don't see how anyone can get clean soaking in his own sweat. The very idea of it sounds filthy."

"Anyway Lee will sauna with us," my father said. The dinner table became a battle ground, but in the end I would sauna with the men.

Then, of course, there was the episode of the lie-fish. We drove into Seattle to the public market, an all day trip in the hot confines of a car, while my grandfather spat tobacco juice out the window. I remember food stalls, oranges piled high in beautiful pyramids and the barking of vendors. We went straight to the fish market. My grandfather tried to dicker with a man who wouldn't dicker, relying on my father to translate.

"A,a. Too high, price too high." We walked away. My father removed his billfold and gave my grandfather several bills. We returned to the fish market. My grandfather waved his finger at the dry lie-fish hanging up-side-down in loops of twine. We bought what



seemed a cord of the stiff, board-like fish, parading it back to the car in our arms.

In this way my grandfather brought tradition to the dinner table. It was an involved route. First the lie-fish must be soaked, the water changed daily until the fish became pliable and the lie released. My mother refused to cooperate. She said the lie would eat holes in our stomachs. She sat with folded arms while my father prepared the meal. The fish became jelly that slid on our plates.

"I can still taste the lie," my mother said, pleased that her suspicions had been borne out. "I won't let the children eat this. You two can rot your stomachs, but we'll have sandwiches."

My father translated. My grandfather raised his head to listen. He looked at my mother and grunted. He was a dedicated man at mealtimes. He attacked his food noisily, sucking in mouthfuls and releasing his satisfaction. I became afraid watching him, his appetite was so boundless and fierce.

Those days glitter now. The spangled mornings endured until late afternoon. I can picture the chicken house on the hill, the fenced in yard where the hens scratched. The tang of manure and lime pinches my nostrils. I carry buckets of feed and water and the chickens, anxious to be fed, form a red sea at my knees. I remember the rite of rolling heads and severed necks, and burying my hands in damp feathers while my mother singed the white bodies over flaming newspapers. And I can remember my grandfather keeping his distance, sitting at the picnic table, the sun at his back, methodically pawing at a raw salt-fish.

When we finished butchering the hens my father crossed the yard and sat down at the picnic table with my grandfather, while my mother scowled. Later I went with the men to the sauna. The heat choked me. I remained on the bottom step while my father sat with my grandfather on the top step conversing in Finn. I was the water boy, in this case a privilege. I liked making the steam that gushed against the ceiling and came floating down around us, erasing our visibility.

That summer with my grandfather ended with another car ride. I shook hands with him when he boarded the train and to this day I retain the impression of that monstrous hand taking mine into it. Several years later we drove to Wyoming to visit him in Superior. He was sixty-five and he was pitching old photographs into an incinerator in the backyard when we arrived. He had been pensioned

and he was about to move to Florida. We drove him to Rock Springs to place flowers on his wife's grave, a last grand gesture before we put him on the train to the land of oranges and coconut palms.

Eventually we moved from the pre-fab cottage to a larger, more comfortable house designed by an architect. My father had become prosperous, and the city had encroached on our preserve. These were the days of angry chainsaws. Trees fell to make way for suburbs. Bulldozers and earth-movers leveled the land and contractors built houses, the basements of which flooded in the winter. Even now there is little beauty in these sub-divisions, although trees, deciduous trees, help to hide the thoughtlessness and the scars. I can remember fighting city children whenever I was called hick or farmer. We were no longer part of the community. The community was big and amorphous. Churches and gas stations vied for diminishing land, as did schools and shopping centres. And the forest retreated, leaving small stands here and there that first-comers clung to despite rising property taxes.

We learned by long distance that my grandfather had remarried. He drove an old Desoto all the way from Florida to show off the bride, a small, plump Finnish lady with delicate features and manners that contrasted sharply with my grandfather's. Her name was Helmi and she had a flair for making plump, round piglets out of clay. I was in high school and I was intolerant of older people. My grandfather spoke less English than he had ten years before and I coveted a secret disgust each time I saw his dentures soaking in a glass of water. His body had become fragile, after all, he was eighty-two. His joints had slowed his momentum and his face had become hollow, especially without his teeth. I was young and I was arrogant and I was proud of my physique, as he must have been in his youth. I was overhauling an old jalopy and to demonstrate my strength I hoisted the engine block in my bare hands.

"Someday make good blacksmith," he said, and for twenty minutes he rambled on in Finnish while I nodded dumbly, grinding my greasy fingers. I looked a young Irishman, curly, black hair, an up-turned nose. But in my body and my gestures I was his grandson. There was a tether as indefinable as time. I remember being impressed by his hands. There was no lack of strength in those meaty, thick, gnarled appendages. Mine would never measure up. They would never have such weight. They would never grasp the world as his had, in deep passageways in the earth.



But what am I trying to say? I grew up as he got older. He returned to Florida where he lived with his newly-taken wife. He lived in the midst of his garden, where grapefruit, lemons, oranges and coconut palms abounded, while the mood of the land got nasty. The time was the late sixties. I gave up my barbells in order to heft weighty ideals. While my grandfather grew old among his flowers. An old Wobbly puttering with his flowers, supported by Old Age pension, Black Lung pension, and Miner's pension. He frowned at the photograph of me with long hair, my father said. He disagreed with my flight north, an old Wobbly amid his flowers. And now it is 1977 and my grandfather is dead. I received the news yesterday by long distance. I will attend the funeral but first I must attend to this. The last years.

At ninety-four, when the Department of Motor Vehicles finally refused to grant him a license, when he was no longer able to take care of himself and his wife, who had become senile, my father brought him north by plane to Seattle and installed him in the tiny pre-fab cottage next door to the big house. For nearly three years the old people lived in those confines, the temperature kept at eighty-five because their bodies were weak and would not adjust to the colder climate.

"We give him pills," my father said. "For his lungs and for his lapses."

An old man with a hearing-aid stuck in his ear, which he kept turned off in order to silence his wife's voice. She spoke incessantly of going home. She could stand at the window and see across the country to Minnesota. "I must go home. Why don't you let me go? Why are you holding me? They won't like it if I don't get home for supper." My grandfather tuned out the deterioration of her mind. If brought to his attention he would say, using the male pronoun, "He's old. He doesn't know what he's saying." But she would out-live him, a young girl lost in her old age.

At ninety-four my grandfather had learned the worth of currency in the new world, and he had learned how to manipulate his children by promising to give or withhold. This began as an old man's mischievousness, but in the end it became paranoia, in the last years, when he could no longer feel secure in his sleep unless his bankbook was under his pillow. But he was old. The restraints were going, and thirty-five years in the mines, and the constant need to be frugal, had exaggerated his character.

I returned for a visit in 1976, allowed into the country because of a



legal loophole. It was spring and the occasion was my grandfather's birthday. His children were there and you could see by the furtive glances that they regarded one another with suspicion, especially the daughter, my aunt, whose dyed hair and sharp features were an eternal declaration of war. My uncle, an urbane man who spent his winters by the Mediterranean, living in pensiones, vascillated in an anguished sort of way. He did not require the inheritance but he was easily persuaded. And my father. With all deference to his ideals, his love of Emerson and Thoreau, he desired his father's blessing too much not to wish its reward.

Both my brother and sister had arrived with their spouses. We sat apart, drinking, exclaiming our virtues insofar as we were not vying for the old man's inheritance.

"I feel the money should be used to put the old people in a home," my sister said. "It's wearing mom and dad out taking care of them."

"You saw the way mother's hands shook." My brother had the mark of a Finn. He was blond and he had the large, thick nose of the Maallinen's, while I looked a story-book O'Connel.

I said, yes, they did appear tired, run-down. My mother's hair was white and my father's cheeks hung slack. But I had not been close to them for ten years. I had not witnessed their aging. In a way, it frightened me. I was made to feel my impermanence.

My grandfather had become a shriveled old man with a wren's face. His movements were ponderous and slow. But his hands. His hands were large and powerful, incongruous paws hanging from bony arms. I went up to shake hands, making myself heard with a shout. He clutched my hand as he spoke in Finn. His eyes were large and watery behind the bifocals.

"He wants to know if you remember helping him build the sauna?" my father translated. "You had one of those little tool sets. He tried to show you how to use the saw. You didn't want to be shown. Instead you told him you didn't like him and went back to the house. He says you were a stubborn register even then."

"Tell him I inherited that streak from him," I said, knowing he should be flattered on his ninety-seventh. But I had become cynical. I no longer toted ideals as much as I desired to be blameless.

The real celebration came a week later. My father and I went down to the woods to cut firewood. Later my grandfather, walking painfully slow with his cane, came to help us. He dragged branches and tossed them in a pile.

"He likes doing this," my father said. "I'll have to move the branches out from under the trees to burn them, but that doesn't matter. The work makes him feel useful."

I looked at my father, the thick, unhandsome face, the short, sturdy build. I looked at my grandfather, the manual labourer. You could see the legacy in our hands, the diminishing size from one generation to the next. We had come up from the mines.

We finished cutting firewood and climbed the hill to the house. I suggested we take a sauna. "Ensti might enjoy it," I said. "The tradition. It will be passed on."

My father cut the birch switches while I built the fire. My grandfather looked on with approval, clacking his dentures. It was a bright spring day, and warm, but he shivered on being undressed. He had almost no musculature and no fat. My father was heavy and carried a paunch. I had kept trim being on the road, working at seasonal jobs such as tossing hay. My father brought a bottle of whiskey from the house and we sat drinking while we bathed. Again I was the water boy. I made the steam that erased our visibility. Then we beat ourselves with the birch switches.

"I'm an old man," my grandfather said. My father and I were dressing him. He cleared his throat and went on, "I haven't much life. All, everything is gone. Pretty soon I die," and then he spoke in Finn.

I waited for my father to translate. The way he firmed his face, I knew it was an emotional moment for him.

"He says it will make his passing easier knowing he has such a grandson. He can die happily, he says."

"Tell him he has a lot of years left," I said.

I learned that night that my father was going to put the five acres up for sale.

"We'll keep the house, but we'll give up the land. The taxes are too high." He paused. "You know, it was really his land. I couldn't have bought it without his help. I won't tell him until the sale is confirmed. Perhaps by then —"

"I understand you," I said.

But I was thinking of myself, the fact that I was lost to motion, a Maallinen, whose very name was earthly, a man on the road in the new world.



## **THE WISDOM OF YOGA ON THE PLAINS OF ABRAHAM**

I was bringing trouble again.  
Without feeling any small pain,  
I calculated this grim look  
and that unfinished sentence and left  
the door open,  
pulled back in my hole like a wounded badger  
and headed for the field where Montcalm fought Wolfe,  
intent on a giant loss of perspective.

These people, rolling in hot pursuit  
and snuggling in trees;  
“Alive! Men died here. In fifteen  
minutes of battle  
two men became street names.  
The ground you’re on breathes;  
it breathes. You might  
see things move.  
If these canons could still deliver  
I’d march you off the cliffs.”

No lotus today.  
This great tension steals my stretch,  
leaves me on my back.

I hate my hands for what they feel.  
On cold nights I’ve stayed awake  
imagining stiff legs with paws growing  
from my shoulders and hips and running  
until I never got tired.  
Or I’d settle for roots.  
Or scales.  
Feathers.

This river bends with me,



my blood flowing like its fish  
through arms and legs,  
a delta of dredged-up bitterness:  
about to give in  
when the day draws the poison off  
like good salt water.

## THE PREPARATION OF THE OUTER MAN

is a serious affair.

Before anything else, wash your hands.

You are leaving a world behind

and your stride must be gauged between logs & rapids  
and the dens of old beavers.

Think of the head.

Cover it, and cover it again on cold nights  
for heat rises faster here

than graylings to fat grubs, but does not return.

And remember the small in the wilderness,  
screening them to a distance, keeping the vital tubes & sockets,  
the great rush of air,  
believing in each other.

Wear your parka like a little house,  
for if all else fails you must live there  
until rescue, shelter, redemption or resurrection arrives and  
convinces you that a burning log heats better  
than the burrowing of mice under your ear  
or the cough of a wolverine moist on your neck.

What you wear on your feet should not touch the ground  
and if ever invited  
to go barefoot by moss or pine needles  
do so immediately,  
abandoning boots to high limbs and dancing  
until you melt.

Now, in heat for the forest and Barren Grounds,  
consider the maps. Draw on them;  
circles of intended confusion, lines showing true north,  
good spots for cabins or battalions of wolves.  
Turn then with your eyes into bogs, hummocks or  
mountains ragged with youth;  
and this must be done in all good faith,

never doubting the eyesight of explorers  
or the drift of their logic, just as you recognize the  
sun & moon and can name each in order, day after night.  
But if you find plains where swamps should be  
or boreal forests rising from lake-beds and  
can no longer believe in topography, geography or even  
the stars, give in  
to all mad impulses, run wildly through scrub pine,  
drop all that you carry and hope  
for the slow sleep of a deep canyon.



## PORK SAUSAGE

Deep into winter the old farmer undoes  
his tie and limps down into the storm cellar.  
there rummaging among the hanging beds  
and jars in dusty cartons, he unearths  
the sausages, the dolls he stuffed  
last spring, who sit up wide-eyed  
    as mummies awakened from their slabs,  
and holding one high, a fresh lung,  
    moth by the wing for a lantern,  
together they go off once again,  
the mannikins toddling behind him  
exploring the marbled passages,  
the tapering fingers of a stream  
underneath his fields. meanwhile  
the old tedder begins drumming  
its fingers in the soggy orchard  
where it was thrown last year,  
and his wife struck behind the ear  
    by the smears of butter  
that come and go before the clouds claps  
for her cockerpoo she just sheared for spring,  
who runs in and out the screen door  
barking at the mound of hair she threw  
in the back yard, curled under the tree.

## **BILL GREENFIELD AND THE DEVIL**

The Adirondacks have spawned, folks say,  
some great yarn-spinners, but the biggest one  
was Old Bill Greenfield who told the story  
of how he met up with the Prince of Liars.

Old Bill was out walking in his field  
when suddenly, from a cloud of smoke,  
The Devil appeared and grabbed Bill by the arm.  
"Bill Greenfield," he said, "Your time has come!

Old Bill was not one to give up easy.  
"Satan," he said, "I'll come with you  
unless I can think of just one thing  
on this Earth you cannot do."

Then The Devil said, "Bill, you've got a deal,  
but three chances are all I'll give to you."

Bill sat down for a moment, then said,  
"Look here, Satan, can you pull that big elm  
I've been meaning to cut right up out of the ground?"

Then The Devil plucked that big tree up  
with one hand like it was a daisy.

Bill sat down once again and then said,  
"Tell me, Satan, can you take that big boulder  
I've been meaning to drag up out of my corn  
and squeeze water from it?"

Then The Devil reached out and squeezed a stream  
of water from that rock like it was a sponge.

A cold wind then began to blow  
and The Devil smiled, sure that he  
would soon have Bill's soul, but just then  
Old Bill looked up at him with a grin.

"Satan," he said, "In this great wide world  
can you find just one liar bigger than Bill Greenfield?"

Then The Devil sat down and cried.



## BRIEF NARRATIVE

The affair lasts one week.  
Then she returns to England.  
All autumn they write passion  
by double-stamp airmail post.  
He promises to arrive for Christmas.  
Her calendar is splendidly marked.  
Of course the trip is delayed.  
He suggests February exam break.  
Again she can't sleep for counting.  
This time he IS at Gatwick.  
What a magnificent picture! New  
Mexico sun-burnt in full white.  
She lends him some thick sweaters.  
Together they think of Paris and Venice.  
Then, some trouble in bed.

"Why didn't you say something?"  
"I guess I felt that awkward."  
(Oh these lovers, how they manage.)  
"You think I'm some kind of mind-reader?"  
"Please, I'd rather we dropped it."  
(Now one of those vibrant moments.)

She glares at the stained hotplate.  
He drums his spoon on the teacup.  
Curtain on London Weekend Number One.

Weekdays as always she has her job.  
He sleeps late then plays the piano.  
Evenings they visit pubs and folk clubs  
walking some distance for his preference.  
He falls in love with the Thames bridges.  
She grows so tired she can hardly answer.

Then two weeks are up.  
Right on time, he flies back.

In the form of a thank you  
he send a final airletter.  
She writes a reply, then burns  
the paper in the gas fire  
deciding silence is better.

Of course they both suffer,  
she especially with a strep-throat  
which lasts more than a month.

## HUNTER'S DANCE

The dancer from Georgia  
hurls his knives  
under the leaping feet  
of the local farmers  
and kicks so high  
they soon flee  
or drop, corpse-like,  
on the polished floor.

Or this is the picture  
flashed on the television  
we are watching in mid-Wales.

Outside, sheep are huddled  
against the New Year rain.  
It is as raw as in Georgia,  
and the northnorth wind  
hurling between the hilltops  
is as many steel knives.

This is a country set  
with a Biblical feel  
as if made for parable,  
Old Esau and Yacov  
taking up fur and ploughshare  
stand apart.

Here we have the dancer,  
a bald farmer called Glynn.  
His jackboots are rubber.  
He wears a potato sack  
over his shoulders  
and whistles to warm himself.

No one can miss the connection.  
Here dance



is born again in the fields,  
and the war challenge rides  
unreined on the wind.  
The farmer, Yakov or Glynn,  
struggles with Nature,  
while the hunter, Esau or Peter,  
lusts for the pure kill.

The barn flares up.  
The drays stumble out.  
Sheep are gutted.  
The farmer is used like a woman  
and kicked into a puddle.  
In the end, the hunter  
hurls the unburied skull  
against the cracked plough.

Or this is the picture  
the manic Russian elicits  
as we watch him  
leap  
across the farmer's screen,  
and blink, as he bows,  
backing away from center stage.

## **I'M SITTING DOWN IN THE FIELD LIKE AN IDIOT**

I'm sitting down in the field like an idiot with aimless hands  
and mumbling and eyes that don't look at anything in  
particular a dummy the oldest sister was supposed to bring  
in the house when it got dark but forgot it's been hot all  
day and the moon has risen at eye level in a blur of mayweed  
and yarrow from the frayed edge of the field

how innocent the weeds are and the swarm of gnats like a big  
amoeba and the now dead mosquito that stuck its mouth through  
my pants leg and the crickets I hear suddenly as if someone  
pulled 13 fingers out of my ears and the air is wet it makes  
the inside of my nose feel heavy

and I've bowed and scraped to the glitterings on the leaves and  
now sat down on the wakening giant of chaos I'm nervous  
at its yawning and stretching in the dusk and as it gets  
up I fall over on my back and howl like a dog up the road  
you listen to for an hour trying to figure out what's wrong

it sounds so awful that the mice close up their ears and the  
chickens shut down and women maunder at the sinks their  
hands in the dishwater.

there is a sort of shelter  
out of the wind  
in under those crumbling cliffs  
where the gulls could sing  
but they whisper  
in the voice they heard  
come out of a shell  
the waves had filled with sand

and he often sits there  
beside a small fire  
he's made out of the driftwood  
he'd gathered  
fumbling in the dark  
for a match he'd thought he'd brought

for there are some days when the bay  
stumbles down a rough track  
through a field of broken  
grass and wet  
glistening rocks  
to sit so  
and watch the bull kelp  
suck and grunt  
on its shelf  
and all those other fields  
of black horse mussel  
waiting for the season  
when the cliffs will loom up  
above the surf  
north of here  
where there is a sweep of marram grass  
and sand hills stretched so many miles  
the birth marks show  
a few hills  
all dressed up with farms



and farmers who have buried  
their first born  
under a hot sun  
at the church  
and driven home  
and gone out  
and disced and harrowed far  
too far  
into the night  
up north  
where the marram grass  
grows and peters out  
like a family line  
curving into the barren womb  
of the Seaward Kaikouras  
still stained with a red kelp  
where these plains end

and it's maybe ten miles out  
fishing for sharks  
and the damn net's  
got itself fouled  
on an inshore wind  
I'd say  
strained its guts  
on no. 8 fencing wire  
still nailed to a post  
some damn fool threw into the river  
not even thinking  
you could smash it up  
and have enough  
to start a fire  
in that hole  
just round the point  
he can't even whisper in

*from The Winter Fisherman*

## THE FOURTH LETTER

Harrison: March 30th. Deposit, New York. Where the logs jammed in the river's throat, where the railroads deposited their freight before the railroads washed downstream with vouchers from banks in the depression. Here is where it piles up, the memory's debris, sticks in the thicket and plastic bags that mark high water from thaw and rain. Waters broken; streams subside, slightly, to the swift coursing of your blood. Christ, the shit that piles up. The Sear's Catalog of the soul's flotsam: eel grass on underbrush — the hair of lovers, the submerged baby's trike, beer cans and the streamworthy bottles, car tires in apostrophe to open roads and blondes in convertibles. Those white streaks: milk or spit or sperm. The stuff that piles up. The skeletons of birds and fish — fleshed out, these are the forms you take in dreams. Rinds, crusts, wrappers, coats, peels, skins, shells — which means someone has got the succulent insides, the dark meat, thighs. And those unidentified bits, too, that are shards of remorse or joy that will be carried to confluence. Garbage: our only resource that grows, like these words grow, in heaps. An anthology of detritus: newspapers and funnies — the red letter news. Water logged print that doesn't touch the edge of pages, the stream's poems, I guess. When it's not residue you see, it's reflection: the sun in chunks, the trees reticulation. A face that alternates fat and thin. Falstaff and you father, Emma Goldman and Keats, Benjamin Bunny and the Flathead Chief. Man, beast, androgyne. You're 65% water. Half the time you don't know who you are, the other half is made up in your mind: the well-preserved body of Richard Nixon floats by, face up, like the Lady of Shalott. I'm making this up, out of leavings of the mind, here in Deposit at the end of the month . . . I've looked these letters over: not enough love. Harrison, I'm leaving you this.

Smith





## THE FOXGLOVE IS A DELICATE FLOWER

Zara took the little car, the German one, and drove the long road back to her, round and round the Iowa country roads, the gravel spinning beneath her tires. The land fell softly up and down in little mounds that they called hills. She closed the door. The wind rustled low through the grasses, whining around their roots. She heard it hum like the sound of moths behind a summer curtain. She felt it brush against her ankles, tickling at the divide of skin and new black shoe. The pasture lay not fifty feet from the family plot, and in the distance she saw the horses running. Flanks that would shine in the sunlight if only there had been a sun today.

Once, the horses had startled at the sound of an auto winding its way slowly, belatedly toward them, as the Reverend Grey droned on under the canopy. The minister glanced up to see a car stalling, a dark veil floating beside him. He began the prayer. The hood was thrown open. Steam rose, and the man ran across to the fountain where today this same daughter would take the watering can to nourish roses as she had done time and again. Long flames rose from the engine as the old man bounded between the tombs at the graveyard's edge, sloshing water from the can. He poured water on the engine. From under the funeral tent, Zara Montgomery watched him drown the flame.

The sod had been cut, the blade lifted, turned at right angles; the grass was unrolled like a carpet, replaced over the woman's body. When Forster Montgomery had gone home again, when the mourners had fallen asleep, tossing throughout the house in the dark vapors of whiskey, the rain fell like fingers against the window panes. Zara drove out again to her mother's grave. She ran her hands around the edges beyond the slick grassy leaves, beyond the roots thick like sponge to where the water ran in rivulets into the mud.

Zara could not remember when the change occurred, when her mother's outward healing gave way to a deeper wound. Kathryn lay bundled in the blue blanket, almost supine in her traveling chair, listening as her daughter pushed. Wooden wheels pressed against the earth. Branches clicked against their spokes as Zara wheeled her mother through the dawn to the favorite spot overlooking the cliff, the water, where Kathryn could see, remotely, Chautauqua Park down the beach where she used to sing, where the crowds used to

shout and wave their white handkerchiefs high over their heads to hear her again. The days grew shorter, the leaves fell about them, and it was crisp and life was full as the sun rose, struck them obliquely, shifting low through the shrubs and growing rose-coloured across the lightly capping sky.

Zara stayed with her a semester and then another, tending to her, carrying her about as her mother grew smaller, lighter, as if she were evaporating on their brief travels from room to room. And as they walked, Zara would press her belly to her mother, and Kathryn would wrap herself around it, coiled, as if a fetus wound about some revelation in the womb.

It was then that Zara thought perhaps this was not her mother dying here, but that she herself was dying wrapped up in her arms. The little bundle, the babe, the mother-child. "Little one, little one," Zara sang and tucked her mother in and washed her skin and kissed her gently on the ears.

"Once," her mother said, "once we took the train. All night it was bugs and rain and soot. And the conductor crying, Feet out of the aisles, Feet out of the aisles. All the way from Oakland with our legs cramped from riding upright. And how we hurried," she said. "We hurried to get to the tent, we hurried to finish our songs, we hurried to catch the next train out. We hurried even when we slept. And, of course, we never did sleep. Not really. We were too tired. Hopping from train to motorcar to train, and when we did get a bed we didn't want it. Bugs again. It's funny," she said. "Traveling all that way for a whoop or two. But, we were bringing something; the Chautauqua was. Zara," Kathryn said. "Don't be a crusader. If you have to have a cause, make it be yourself."

"But Mother," Zara said. "Wasn't the Chautauqua route your crusade?"

"I thought it was," her mother said. "I thought my work was important. But maybe I was wrong. It was important to me."

The feathers were piled on the chopping table. Beside the pheasant heads, black eyes lay like polished stones.

"Have you washed your hands?" Mrs. McGehry asked the child. Zara turned her palms for the inspection. At the table, the woman reached into the flesh at the neck of a bird and with one motion pulled the entire skin away, the down intact. She handed Zara the knife. "Now bend the leg back and cut through the joint." She took the girl's



hands into her own, guiding the blade into the niche, and the child felt a little pride in being asked to help with this task. Zara cut the other leg herself, hearing Mrs. McGehry say, "Some day you'll be a fine lady. Someday you'll have to know these things." And Zara thought, Mummie is a fine lady, and she doesn't know. Why is that?

Mrs. McGehry poked absently at the whole pellets of corn in the green innards. "This is a fat one," Bridie said. "This one was still preparing to be served up with the sauce."

Mrs. McGehry measured out the milk for the afternoon scones. She poured it into a pool in the center of the flour. Zara's great grandfather had been an apothecary pouring syrups into bottles, Zara had heard her mother speak of this. Zara took the broom with the handle Mrs. McGehry had shortened specially for her. She heard the wooden spoon beating against the great blue bowl. She made the dust fly out the crevices on the back porch. Soon her mother would be galloping the mare over the far hill, soon she would fly up the road under the trees and walk the mare into the stable.

"Your mum will be wanting to hear your piano." Mrs. McGehry called from the kitchen. "Have you practiced?"

"Yesterday, a long time."

"You mean, a little. You'd better make tracks, Girl."

In the living room, Zara put the large dictionary on the bench. On the west coast of Ireland, Mrs. McGehry said, if you were a bad sinner, they put you in a wee little boat without oars and set you out to sea to fend for yourself. Zara wondered how bad you would have to be to deserve such a very mean fate.

Kathryn Montgomery wanted to say many things to her daughter asleep behind her on the bed. Selfish words, some of them. Sentimental phrases, too. She would have asked Zara to take her from this room, to carry her as she used to do. Impossible tasks now. There were other things. Zara slept lightly and all Kathryn needed to say was: Zara, I have a pain and I can't sleep. Zara would have opened her blue eyes, blue like her father's, blue as Kathryn Montgomery's were. She would have said, Foxglove, do you want me to rub your back?

Pink flower lotion on skin over bones, stretched very tight. Lotion and fingers to relieve the roaring in her ribs. Instead, Kathryn's pencil moved under the light at her bedside table, slating words in her crossword puzzle book, confining them in small tight squares.



She could not turn from her side by herself nor with help from anyone. Her world was divided into quadrants. Fore and aft, port and starboard. At the edge of her puzzle she wrote with a felt-tipped pen: I am stamped on my sheets like a label. She crossed it out again.

The culprit was the hip. The Hog. Or so she called the tumor rising there. She would have tatooed it with a fine fat swine if that too had not involved the pain. She drew fat features on the sheenless cover of the magazine. A pugnacious snout, the tips of teeth. She gave him legs with which to run. Cloven hooves throughout her body. A word for metastasis: stampede. *Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.*

Kathryn adjusted the lamp. The slender beam picked out the ruffle of white at latticed window, a sailing ship of darkened blue on darker blue and papered wall, the red-black of roses drooping in her milk glass vase. She shined the light behind her toward the ceiling, fixing the table mirror on its painted stand. She tilted it until her daughter's face rose sleeping in the mirror's frame. Zara. Auburn hair tumbling around your oval face. A word for help, six letters: hold me. She put the book aside. Arms.

Doctor Montgomery had gone to the office, Zara was asleep in the basinet upstairs when Katie came down in her nightgown. Her little breasts were full.

"I need something to wear," Kathryn said.

"There it is—" Mrs. McGehry pointed to the fresh clothes she had just ironed, crisp as new lettuce from the garden.

Kathryn took off her gown and put on the first dress. "This isn't right," she said. "There's a crease in the collar."

"Where's a crease?" Bridie asked her. Kathryn showed her the faintest of lines. "That wrinkle's been ironed out, Katie."

"I can see it. I can't wear that dress."

"It's on the back," Bridie said.

Kathryn took it off and put on the next one, looking at herself in the mirror. "This one makes me look so bloated."

"Katie," Bridie said, setting the iron up on its end. "You could use a little bloating. Water, fat, take what you can get. You're scrawny as a mosquito."

"Fat," she said.

"Put on the blue one. You always look nice in the blue."

She pulled it on after Mrs. McGehry had watched her rumpling the green cotton in a chair, her face puckered in the mirror.

"You look lovely. Comb your hair, you'll feel better."

"I can't find my comb."

"For goodness sakes, Katie. What's the matter?"

"I can't find anything to wear in this house. Not one thing I look decent in. I look like a hag in everything I own." She threw the blue in the chair. Mrs. McGehry could see it wrinkling without even laying her eyes on it.

"Here, Katie, I'll iron up the flowered one. It's the most beautiful dress you own." Bridie McGehry knew this. Katie could have rivaled anyone in that dress. The purple setting off her eyes like the Persian turquoise she wore at her neck and dangled from her ears. On top of those dresses, she sat down, naked and waiting, fussing with her hair, braiding it up and letting it down. Combing out the waves and then saying it never curled.

Bridie McGehry was careful not to scorch or crease it, even on the interfacing or seams. She said, "There. You couldn't have wanted it better from the Chinese laundry." She watched Kathryn Montgomery pulling it over her head, the folds falling over her shoulders, then drifting onto her breasts and belly.

"Now I've caught my hair. Now I caught my hair on a button."

Mrs. McGehry set her own small hands to unwinding the dark strands from the button. "My Lord, Katie. You are having a bad day."

"What makes this day so different?" Kathryn asked from under the cloth. "Every single day is unbearable for me."

"Why, Katie, the Lord should reach down and slap your face. You have a wonderful husband, a brand new baby, a big house. You don't even have to do your own cooking. You can do whatever you want." Mrs. McGehry zipped her up the side. "Now don't tell me you don't look good in this one. Don't try to tell me that nonsense."

"You don't know what giving up your work means."

"Go down town, Katie. See a movie."

"With whom? Who would go anywhere in this town with me except for Forster? Everyone hates me. They hate me because I sing, because I'm different."

"No one hates you, Katie."

"Then why am I alone everyday? Everyday I am alone and no one asks for me."



"People ask for you all the time. I go down town and everyone asks how you are and how's the baby. Mabel Willoughby inquires after you everyday when I see her."

"Mable Willoughby!" she screamed. "Do you think Mabel Willoughby and I have anything common? Do you think she wants anything more than gossip?" Then Kathryn Montgomery ripped her dress right down the front. The little pearl buttons she had chosen so carefully scattered all over the rug. She kicked the silk dress under the ironing board and ran upstairs. Bridie McGehry shook her head. She runs naked, she thought, right in front of the living room window, where anyone driving by can see her. Mrs. McGehry heard her sobbing for over an hour.

When Kathryn came down, she put on the first dress, the brown one, leaving the front open. She went upstairs and got the baby. She nursed her on the windowseat where the sun fell pink through the stained glass window spreading like leaves across her hands.

Kathryn had not been asleep for days now. Her mind made distortions of body parts the cancer hadn't yet affected. Each night she witnessed the loss of every hair, the slow bending of her bones. The week before, she thought her face another victim. "The Hog has gotten loose," she blurted, breaking into tears.

"What's that?" Zara asked, looking up from the book she was reading aloud to her.

"The Hog has done this, too."

"What do you mean?"

"It's my face."

Zara held the mirror for her mother at angle after angle. She held up old photographs: from under the flap of the great canvas tent, her mother stepped squinting into a silver sun. Zara took her mother's makeup from the drawer. She drew with the lipstick around the crest where her mother's lips rose in two soft curves; she filled in the center with the crimson flat of the tube. "Now, be objective, Foxglove."

"I can't," she said. "I don't know how."

"How do you like music camp?" Kathryn asked, taking off her shoes and setting them side by side next to the door. Belted at the waist, her skirt flared below the knees. Seams ran straight down slender legs. "Is it what you expected?" She watched her daughter folding underwear, arranging neat stacks inside the drawer.



"I like it alright," Zara said. The others were swimming now. Michael and her friends were in the pool.

"Only all right? I thought you wanted to come here this summer. I'd hoped you would be enthusiastic, Zara."

"I met a boy," she said, although she had met him before.

"A boy?" Kathryn looked out the window then. "But what about the music?" she asked, waiting for Zara to model the dress she had chosen for the evening concert.

Zara shrugged. The music. She remembered the metronome clicking, her fingers memorizing first scales. "I can hear you humming," her mother said. "Do you want me to hear you?" By the time she was eight, Zara had the mechanics. "Play with feeling," her mother said. Feeling, the child thought. Two hours on the hardwood bench each day and she could not know feeling, only her fingers growing stronger, more articulate.

Kathryn watched her daughter removing the long dress from the closet. "What about the music, Zara?"

"The music is fine," she said. "Everyone plays well."

"And you?"

"I do all right."

"Could you do better?"

"I do fine, Mother."

"You don't need to snap at me. I only asked if you could do better. We could all improve. I wonder if you realize that."

"I practice, I get better."

"I only wondered, Zara."

"You only wondered if I would embarrass you, if I was as good as everyone else."

"Of course you're as good as everyone else. I never doubted you, Zara."

You have always doubted me, Zara thought. She took off her jeans, untied the white, men's shirt where the tails had been knotted at her middle. "I have to shower now," she said putting on her robe.

So it is Michael O'Dea, Kathryn thought, sitting in the fourth row of wooden chairs. She watched the boy's eyes meeting her daughter's in quick glances as if their bodies were touching. The camp director pointed at individuals with his wand. The orchestra tuned. The notes falling like the random knots in the pine behind the white dresses and shirts, the grand piano and violins, the black claw-footed instrument stands in what had once been a stable.

One day Kathryn's father had come home early from the bank and ordered the stable boys to bring the mare from the pasture. Kathryn sat on top of the fence and watched them put the collar around her horse's neck, straightening the leather straps down its sides, shackling the mare's hind legs so it could not struggle.

She could remember her father laying his tweed coat beside her, rolling his sleeves as he walked. The young boys hanging on, each to a rope. They planted their feet firmly in the grasses, as if they, not the mare, were tethered, waiting to receive the stallion: the black shadow moving against the earth as her father led it through the gate toward them.

"Give us a good one," he said, as the stallion scented the mare and rose up. His hooves glinting like shells in the sun as the mare tried to kick free. The stable boys leaning like the pickets of a fence in strong wind, their heels dragging. The hobbles creaked as the mare shifted. The stallion on top. The mare shaking off attempt after attempt, until "Hell," her father said and took the great pike of the horse in both hands and guided it in. Her father was flushed when he came for his jacket. He was silent.

Zara waited, hands lifted, fingertips on keys while the bow rubbed gently across the strings of Michael's violin. It wouldn't matter who he was. It made no difference how he helped her, or how she needed someone. Kathryn watched, listened to them tuning as the others did, but a crease cut between her eyebrows and ran onto her forehead. Every night when they were young, before Zara's birth, Doctor Montgomery pedaled his bicycle up and down the rutted lane that made a circle in front of the house. Round and round he rode the rusted machine while Kathryn leaned out the upstairs window, the white curtain waving at her side. "Give Mickey a little ride, Forster," Kathryn called as the dog yapped along behind him nearly catching his head between the spokes. The housekeeper drew her hands to her hips, crying from the front lawn: "That dog is going to bust his head off. Sever it off right above the collar if you don't watch out."

Doctor Montgomery wrinkled the corners of his eyes and cocked his head to the side. "Now Bridie," he said. He always said, "Now, Bridie." Kathryn Montgomery remembered that. Then he reared up on one wheel and pedaled off, his coat tails whipping under the trees.

Forster stood a medium height then with light brown hair and beard, and his forehead was advancing on his hairline even then. This scarcity of hair had attracted Kathryn to him, that and the erratic way



the young man whirled into sudden motion. Doctor Montgomery liked to say he had saved her from a life of meandering with the Chautauqua from rooming house to small town hotel. "I took her off the railway," he'd say with his arm around her, "and what a struggle I had with that conductor." Then Kathryn would smile up at him and press her fingers gently at his side, thinking behind the azure pleasure of her eyes not of her husband but of the crowds and the sound of her own voice rising in the farewell songs from the railroad platform. She would look a little sad then and he would take it for the melancholic effects of love. "Would you like a little brandy, Darling?" he would ask her. "You look tired this evening." At this she would shake her head and smile at her guests, thinking how pleasant it was to have a husband who was concerned and gentle and protective.

Red streaks crept into Kathryn's eyes. "My leg is ruined. And my arm. Now the Hog has started on my nose."

Zara looked at the photograph. "Turn your head," she said. "You're wrong, Foxie."

"It's shrinking. It's twisted out of shape just like my leg. A dreadful chicken leg. And now my face, Zara. Look at it."

Zara took the picture to the window and examined it. She watched her mother a long while. Combing Kathryn's hair, she fluffed it forward, giving it the effect of its former fullness. She stood back and looked again. "All right, Foxie," she said. "It's changed."

Kathryn covered her face with the motionless fingers of the hand she called the Right One Gone Wrong.

"Yes," her daughter said. "It's longer."

Kathryn pulled the mirror toward herself. "Longer?"

"Yes. I think it's gotten rather long now."

Kathryn turned the mirror to its magnifying side and back; she held the tip of her nose down and let it up again. She studied the portrait. Her face went suddenly red with anger. "Zara Montgomery, my nose is not at all longer than it was. You lied to me. You lied and it was horrible. A horrible thing to do to me."

Zara shrugged, tapping her mother gently on the forehead. "How else was I to get you to believe me? Your nose is *not* shorter, Mother." She kissed her on the ear then and went to retrieve the book.

Kathryn fingered the edge of the mirror. "But, Zara—"

"Foxie. There are two things I'm positive have not been affected."

"What?"



"They're your appetite and your nose."

"Oh," her mother said, knowing that, for some reason, even when she would be throwing it all up again, she was, as always, continually hungry.

On the trunk of the automobile, Zara leaned against the warm back window as she watched them pitching the softball back and forth. She could almost see the indentations their fingers made, the crest of their fingernails gone white as they wound up for the pitch. Burnout. That's the way they played it. Too hard for her, they said. Why then did they use the softball? she had asked; and they had not wanted to say that their older brother had taken the baseball and told them to move their game elsewhere.

It was the glove she liked, the leather of it around her hand. Her father's worn catcher's mitt with a bit too little padding in the palm. Yes, you could feel the sting of a real ball through that, but you would have to wait until one boy tired and the other wanted to go on with the game. Until they resorted to you as a partner. Today she was not waiting for them to summon her. It was her father for whom she was waiting. He would come out of the house soon now, carrying his black leather case, his anger transformed into hurry. Zara rolled the cuffs of her dungarees. What did it matter what caused it? They were shouting and the anxiety had filled the house and threatened to blow the top off. She had seen her mother recoil at her father's touch. She'd seen her make a joke of it. "Unhand me, you cad," Kathryn Montgomery said, an edge in her laughter, a chill across the shoulders. She watched her father's face, saw the quick motion of his throat.

Zara put her hand on the doorknob. "Dad, can I go on the housecall?"

"Yes," he said, without turning away from his wife.

"I'll wait outside."

"Yes, do that."

The ball flew back and forth smacking against palms. "Yes Kathryn. I know, Kathryn." The front door slammed, and Zara leapt from her spot on the back of the car into the front seat of the Buick.

"Where are we going?" she asked, watching him shoving the window button. The glass buzzed downward.

"Mary Colley has a belly ache."

"Mary Colley?"

"I've got aches myself," Forster said. "And they aren't caused by Mary Colley's mother." He looked into the rear view mirror as if he could still see the house. "To top it off, this damnable hayfever." He crumpled a handkerchief onto the seat between them.

"Mary Colley goes to school with me."

"Is that right?" Forster said.

"She's in her last year. She's up for autumn queen."

"Watch your arm." He reached for the button again. "It's either bake and breathe or explode coolly."

The window rose like a crack in the scenery as the road swerved into the country and straightened, narrow now with hardly any variation. Forster's head turned automatically left then right as they passed the sections of farmland squarely marked when each mile had ended. The corn would be high in a matter of minutes, golden tassles pollinating in every direction. Forster blew his nose. Would the woman never stop needling him? Was it his fault, after all, that she was unhappy? He had not been the only one to want to move to this town, though she seemed to think it had been his decision. Even after twenty years she held that against him. And hadn't she been the one to suggest giving up her performances? Yes, he had wanted it that way, but he had never said it. A few years after that the Chautauqua had gone down anyway. People were no longer interested in tent shows, Shakespeare and Schubert, when they could roll into town in their new automobiles and see a moving picture with sound in it. Yes, after that his wife's voice had meant little or nothing. Forster turned up the lane to the farmhouse in time to see Mary Colley's petticoats being hung out on the line like a row of tinted carnations.

From the corner arm chair, Zara sang one of the Haydn songs. Her right eye closed, as her mother tilted the mirror to see her. "*My mother bids me bind my hair*," she sang one afternoon.

"So I thought you were going to read," her mother said, "not bring down the house."

It was this, Kathryn thought, watching her daughter sleeping behind her, that made the old women in town nod over their pale print housedresses saying the girl had a quiet wit. It was in this same way Zara had renamed her in her illness. Kathryn, lying in her bright yellow nightgown one afternoon, had looked into the oval mirror to see her daughter coming through the doorway: she stopped suddenly. "Oh little foxglove!" Zara cried, spying her. "You look so lovely!" It



was this that resurrected them from their gloom. It was Zara.

Kathryn pulled her notebook from beneath the crosswords. In her newly learned, left-handed penmanship, she scrawled a list for her daughter:

*Rehabilitating Your Mama*

Count pills.

Sponge bath with new soap. Skin cream for the bad spots.

When washing hair, avoid tangles — no circular motions.

Move cedar chest. Try bigger pitcher. Bigger pan on floor.

Change sheets. Hair hunt: Get strays off sheets or I won't sleep. (You won't either.)

A snack for the Hog. Swineherd craves a chocolate pudding.

Clip toenails.

Teeth — not white enough. New brush, paste, or something.

At night she lay in the bed with Kathryn, one arm slowly circling against the back, the ribs, soothing Kathryn toward an elusive sleepiness, while the other wrapped itself around a pillow pressed to her chest as if it were a man, someone she knew. Each day, lying there, stroking, her mother's back crept away from her in subtle ways that neither noticed in this form of contentment. Sometimes lying there in this way, Zara would remember things that had happened to her and could not quite know their significance. Driving into the country with her father, Zara had watched him drape his handkerchief out the window and leave it there to dry as they swept up a new paved road. It was like a road he said that his father had helped to build and when they were almost finished all the men had thrown their hats in. Her father had tried to talk to her that day, telling her of things remembered. Then suddenly he had stopped the car.

"Listen," he said. "Do you hear it? It's a cuckoo bird." She had heard it then, the song coming clear across the field, the rise and fall of it back and forth. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he cried. "Can you see the bird? Can you spot it?" He put his hand to his forehead and scanned out over the rows of grain that lay like rails across the pasture. Again they heard the call, slightly out of tune now.

Her father snorted and closed the door. "Blue Jay," he said. "Imitation. You have to watch out for that." The handkerchief fluttered at the window like a gesture.



Zara put her head down on the kitchen table. As she wept, she made no sound at all. Coming into the kitchen. Mrs. McGehry's heart quickened seeing this. She took hold of the table edge. "Zara, whatever is the matter?"

Zara handed her a scrap of paper. So this was the poem Kathryn had been writing all week with Zara excited and waiting to see it. Scrawled in a crippled script, it was as if a bird had scratched it there with its beak:

I am writing this poem  
I am writing this  
I am tied to my bed  
I have given up.

"Ah God, Zara," Bridie said.

Zara wiped her eyes on a napkin. "Finally Mother has accepted it," she said, but Bridie McGehry could see Kathryn Montgomery's daughter hadn't.

"You go to the drugstore," Bridie said. "Go have yourself a soda. I'll sit with your mother."

Bridie went into the laundry room, thankful that the girl had listened to her for once. She heard Zara upstairs saying goodbye to her mother. Mrs. McGehry pressed her hands fondly into the basket. For twenty years she had buried her small yellow-white head in the sweet smell of laundry, letting her feet guide her on the familiar path back to this house. She heard Zara on the stairs. When the girl came down, Mrs. McGehry was more startled than she could remember.

"Mother says she'll be all right she thinks. She'll ring the buzzer if she needs you." Zara had on her winter boots and coat, her gloves and scarf.

Mrs. McGehry set the basket down. "Zara Montgomery, how long has it been since you were out of this house?"

"I don't know," she said.

"My God, girl. It's spring. It's been warm out for close to two months."

"Oh," she said, taking off her mittens. "I didn't know that."

Zara changed her clothes and was gone half an hour before she was back, her arms laden with magazines and lotions for her mother.

Kathryn studied the seed catalogs again, circling in a shaken hand the ones they would order. Feathery Baby's Breath. Blue Stokesia. Giant Primroses. *Primula Polyanthus*. *Finest of the new hybrids, larger blooms . . . brighter colors!* Grape Hyacinths — *Prince of Monaco*. *Fantastic clusters of closely set, dark blue bells on 6 inch spikes! Increase from year to year without care at all.* Christmas Rose. *One of gardening's most thrilling experiences is to walk through the snow and pick these glistening white blossoms.*

Kathryn scanned the bedroom with her cone of light. In her notebook she wrote her way around the room. Beginning with the bed she named the objects, the legacy she would leave her daughter.

*That night the rain came in torrents, the tent flaps shaking all around us, the beams and lines swaying in the wind. It could be a bad night for everyone, I said. Until this sudden downpour, the day had been hot and getting hotter. Up and down the aisles all afternoon you could hear the programs trying to beat out the heat and the talk of tornadoes and freak cyclone incidents. Families lifted out of their beds by the wind and laid down dead, side by side in the street. Pieces of straw driven straight into the sides of trees. By evening there was a crazy yellow light in the sky, and then the rain.*

*"We're going on with it," Roderick said.*

*"Yes," we said, looking out through the end of the tent at the jaundiced sky. Already the crowd was uneasy, shuffling back and forth rather than taking their seats.*

*I had on my blue dress. I remember I ripped the hem out as I rushed onto the stage. Schubert with lightning, I shouted. Right in the middle of my first song, Roderick shook his fist at me. I never sang so loud in my life. Good evening, Nebraska, I shouted. Did you hear me? A sea of white handkerchiefs rose into the lamplight for the chautauqua salute. It was like looking out onto rough water or rows of grain with tassels in the thousands gone white and moving in the wind. I was just coming into the line, Roderick used to laugh that it should be that line: The breeze of morn my ardent tale should bear, when George Henry came bursting up the aisle, waving his arms. The next I knew we were in the ditch and it was as if, by the sound, a train*



*were coming through. I looked up and the tent burst out suddenly like a balloon and at the center, through the top, one of the big poles came reeling into the air. It flew straight up and plunged down again into the earth, stuck like a mast. Canvas flew around it in shreds. Get down, someone yelled. Get down. Roderick Dawson put his arm over my face.*

Kathryn dreamed of people in their Sunday suits and dresses gathered around small fires on the plains. She dreamed she opened her window to see her grandfather poking his way through early autumn fields. She dreamed about the times she lost her voice. Three times in all, and each time she remembered her own mother in the room, brown hair floating as she moved. Kathryn dreamed about the last time over and over again. She was fourteen, her mother forty then, wrapping Kathryn in quilts and blankets to stop her shivering; and Kathryn motioning from her speechlessness could only nod and reach for her. Sometimes late at night Kathryn could not breathe, and as she stopped, Zara heard the silence in the room and woke: she pressed gently on her mother's chest.

Now beyond the window of her dream, an oak grew with yellow pheasants flying overhead. A small round animal was rooting at its base. It was nearly dawn when she awoke, when she felt the itch begin.

Thank God, it's the left ankle, she said, grabbing for the light again and the mechanical claw she used to retrieve objects beyond reach. Blessed device, extender of limbs. She went for her bathbrush where it was hanging on her pegboard of amusements. She squeezed the claw's trigger, watched it opening and clasping its silvered digits around the handle of the brush. She jerked it toward her. An itch of convenience: just above the anklebone.

Her left hand moved the brush back and forth around this disturbance. She listened to the sound of it as she worked the bristles into action. She sighed a sigh all scratchers know. She bristle-brushed between her toes, scratching to the knee, grinding energetically around the edges. Up to the thigh, testing this new pleasure. Cautiously, she approached the Hog. A tickle to a twinge and she thrust the brush aside. The pain? She would bear it. She lived in fear of the day when the Hog might conceive an itch. That, quite simply, would be the end.

Kathryn kept a secret list:



Funeral home — not the church  
I want to wear my silk dress.

She thought of Zara reading this someday; she did not want to be cruel, offensive. Brushing a hair from the percale sheet, she thought of satin, smooth as speckled eggs. She wrote:

Could you make the pillow blue?  
Piano music — not the organ  
Everybody sings

Like the days when her grandfather led the parlor songs, his cane pounding on their English hardwood floor, shoes tapping with the most solemn hymns. The apothecary he was called. Bottles and barrels and boxes of powder and fix-it-yourself's. Jars of penny candies for Kathryn his pet. Perfumes and ribbons and hunting excursions. When she was almost Zara's age, they walked the marsh together. "Katie," he said. "Hold that gun tight against your shoulder. Move with the animal. Pretend you are that bird." With each shot, she felt herself rising; she felt herself fall. She was twenty-three when they buried him, his mustache waxed in two tight curls, one defiantly protruding from his face. When she reached out to touch it, her aunts and uncles gasped. You're never too old, he had said, for someone's sweetness. She remembered that.

Sometimes Zara sat on the floor beside her mother and Kathryn patted her back. The young woman's sobs shook the bed, jostling Kathryn. They woke the Hog but she said nothing. It was worth it to be her mother. Kathryn could not bend; she could not grasp a body to her frame. She could not hold her daughter.

Each day Kathryn let her daughter sleep until some need arose, or until she could not longer bear her own loneliness. Kathryn was accustomed to her daughter's presence now; she was dependent on her company. One day a boy from out of town came visiting. Zara stood on the front step and embraced him; she stayed where she could hear her mother calling if she needed her. When she came back and the boy had gone, Kathryn cried. "I don't want to die," she said, but it really wasn't that.

Kathryn watched her daughter's arms lying limply over the covers. "Hold me," Kathryn said quietly. "Zara, are you awake?" Perhaps she only feigns this sleep, Kathryn thought. Bones, Fragile Bones. Everyone is so afraid to break you. "The disease will turn me into powder anyway. Let them break."

The soft wool of the blue blanket rose and fell at angles over her body, drifting on her shoulder with the motions of her sleep, the fabric swelling unnaturally where the tumor distorted the hip. In the far corner of the room, Forster Montgomery watched his wife. He straightened his tie and restraightened it, pulling at the knot, running his hands stiffly along its length, over the place where middle age had fattened him.

He heard water running, drumming against the shower walls in the next room, whirling down the drain at his daughter's feet. Through the window the early morning light shown onto Kathryn's face. Her dark hair was thin now, the fine wisps of it stirring around her temples in the breeze, the rest drawn behind her head in a sort of tail to keep from bothering in her fever. He had offered Kathryn medications, insisting it would ease her pain; but she had refused saying she was saving it for some time when her agony would be more severe. He hardly knew how it could be worse than it was for her now, though he had watched the disease progress: the clusters of tumors throughout her body, spreading from bone to bone in fragile spiderings until each had grown brittle, yet heavier, as if in their weight they were seeking a depth, as if they had already ceased to live.

He felt his gaze go out from him, tracing the tiny ribbon his daughter had fastened around his wife's hair. There were many things Forster could not express now. Each morning when he woke to find himself in the guest room down the hall, he heard his wife and daughter in their private conversations and he felt his sadness grow.

He went to the window now and pulled the curtain toward himself. The light shifted away from her, piercing the opacity of a white plastic pitcher at the side of her bed, on the cedar chest. Something about this glow captured in the center of the jar, reminded him of the wood frame house where he had been raised; it reminded him of a stone basin there in Minnesota in that childhood forty years before. He had watched his mother standing over that basin, lathering her blonde hair in wintertime, the soap frothing around the basin's edge, spilling onto the cabinet. He remembered the thick white foam at the nape of her neck above the place where the satin chemise had ended.

His mother, too, had died young. Downstairs in the white painted kitchen of the little house, he and his brothers had set their chairs on



abrupt back legs as they listened to the wailings of her labor. When the midwife came down, the bloodied sheets in her arms, and shook her head, he had not understood what it meant to lose someone, to lose a mother. That night he held out nails to his father for the building of the coffins, the small one and the smaller one. He made patterns in the sawdust with his feet, while his father planed the lids.

Now he pulled the blanket up a bit to cover his wife and returned to his place of observation. It comforted him to keep her company, even when she was not awake. He unfolded the newspaper and folded it again. When Kathryn had been pregnant with Zara, their only child, he had grown more and more frightened with her growth and finally when, walking in her wide straddling pregnant way, she had voiced this fear herself, he had said: Nonsense, Katie, death is far away for you. And, after all his worry, it had been an easy birth. Then he had chided himself: professional men should be beyond that sort of destructive self-indulgence.

Now, he saw her wake and the color drain suddenly from her face. She was reaching for the pitcher; it was this motion that stopped him in his speech. Katie, I'm here, he should have said, and would have, but now it was too late. Her body doubled on its side. Thin strands of muscle worked along the bone of her arm as she threw green bile from her mouth and nostrils. He would have announced it. The base of the pitcher grew dark with contents. He would have said, Katie.

Perhaps she didn't know he was in the room: he would go to her. He would hold this pitcher for her as he had seen his daughter do. The sounds he daily heard in his work now rose from his wife. But always when she needed help, it was Zara's name he heard: Zara. A tear squeezed out the corner of her eye and rushed down her cheek to where the circle of plastic cut into her face. Perhaps she had seen him watching her. Maybe this pained her. The tear ran down the pitcher at a slant and stopped in its movement like a small snail of innocent condensation. He would stand up and leave her in some privacy, he thought. Katie. But then wouldn't Katie think he had found her repulsive. And if she had not seen him until this sudden departure, then that surely would be her reaction. He clasped his hands together. Slowly, methodically, he wrung his fingers, two against one, one against the other, worrying them as if they were the beads of a rosary.

Her hand was groping on the bed behind her where she kept the stack of towels. It ran along the sheet, the blanket, the bristles of a brush until she found the soft nap of the cloth. She grasped and pulled



it toward herself, the towel unfolding as she did this, the bulk of it falling against the place where the blanket rose over her hip. He saw her wince.

She wiped her face. Under her hand, the mirror shifted on its pedestal until a gold rectangle rose from the hallway. "Zara," she called, ready to have the pitcher taken away. There was a lilt in her voice as if this self-sufficiency had in some way pleased her. Feet, a chair moved in the corner. "Zara?" she asked, startled.

"Katie, I'm here." He came around the bed. "Can I help you, Katie?"

Quickly she stretched for the towel, clutching it with one hand, placing it over the mouth of the pitcher. "I didn't know, Forster," she cried.

"You were asleep when I came in. I didn't want to wake you." He stooped beside the bed, his fingers on the handle of the pitcher.

"I thought —"

He set the pitcher down again. "I didn't mean to startle you, Katie." His hand moved along the sheet, his fingers a coverlet for the sudden immovable angles beyond her wrist. "Katie."

She saw his features gone soft with pity, his hand lying upon the bones of the Right One Gone Wrong.

"Oh, Katie, don't cry. I didn't mean to creep up on you." He laid his hand gently on her back. He felt the thin slices of bone like a fence beneath her skin, the ribs with nothing to conceal their tortured trembling.

Her gaze fell against the pitcher. "Didn't mean to creep," she repeated.

"I didn't know what to do, Katie. Here let me take this out for you."

"I want to be alone," she cried, the Right One Gone Wrong against her breast like a sparrow.

He stood a moment there, the dark blue tie dangling futilely. "Certainly, Katie. I don't want to be here if you don't want me. I just thought to sit here with you awhile would be pleasant for us both."

"Yes," she sobbed. "Wasn't it? Wasn't it pleasant for you?"

"I'm sorry, Katie. I really —"

"Take it. Please take it out," she cried.

Kathryn brushed her teeth quietly using her water glass; she washed with her new soaps. Then she called, "Let's have music, Zara." It would be a fine day: a slice of toast, a poached egg, a piece of

bacon. Dishes rattled in their water, silver against plates, plates against sink, while Kathryn made speeches to the day. "Hold me," she said in preparation.

At the piano Zara stopped on her way from the kitchen. She played the songs her mother had sung on the Chautauqua. She listened fondly to hear her mother shouting out, "Three-four, Three-four;" and as Zara came to the softer parts, the places where her mother would have lowered her voice and whispered pianissimo, she heard her mother's voice rippling in a kind of joy that Zara had never heard.

As Zara played it was as if she were curling on her mother's lap while Kathryn fluttered the pages of Gainsborough, Blake, Madame le Brun. Out the window, she remembered this too now, the plains were passing in the moonlight, for they were on a train going across country. That night her mother had sung to her, as she was singing now, and she thought then that perhaps her mother's voice had parted the huge shafts of grain and let the locomotive through.

Kathryn straightened the sheets around herself and brushed the stray hairs from her face as she heard her daughter on the stairs. Zara's nightgown flowed along the rim of the mirror; her face came into view. "Sit on the bed with me, Zara." Kathryn reached over her shoulder and took her daughter's hand. "Zara," she said. "It's the touching I miss the most. I want to get up and hold you." Now Kathryn stroked the hand. "I can't help it anymore, I have to say it. I want you to pick me up and hold me."

"But, Foxie, I don't know how to do it anymore. I don't know how to do it without hurting you."

"Just once. Please try. I'll tell you what to do."

Zara could see the night when she was a child and a noise had echoed through the house. All night it had gone on. The hollow winging had stirred her mother from sleep and sent the woman pacing through the hallways in her long white nightgown, latching windows as she went. In the morning, her mother cried when she discovered the source: during the night a bird had fallen through the chimney into the dark chamber of the furnace and could not get out. In its frenzy the small yellow bird had beaten itself to death against the walls.

Kathryn told her how to slide her hands beneath the side and pull her onto Zara's lap. That would be the best they could do, she said. As she watched her daughter's reflection moving behind her on the bed, she reassured her.



"I'm not poking you with my fingernails, am I, Foxie?"

Kathryn shook her head as the sheet fell an inch away and then another. Together they came into the focus of the mirror.

Zara saw in the oval glass her mother's lips open and close. "I'm hurting you," she said.

"No," Kathryn said. "Go on."

Zara nudged her leg beneath the tender side, lowering the tiny woman's frame toward her knee. In her palms, Zara felt a pulse flutter beyond the ribs. "Mother, are you all right?" Her mother's lips parted.

Kathryn's ribs did not crack like normal bones. As logs smoulder, then surrender suddenly to ash, her ribs gave way, the flesh folding in on itself around her daughter's hands. For a moment in the mirror then, the Montgomery women saw what they had meant to be, what had passed.



## AID-EL-KEBIR

It is the feast of killing sheep.  
Small boys with buckets of coal come  
and build hot fires.

It is a day of sudden sounds—  
High torn bleating and someone chanting.  
The wind drops.

It is a day of smoke and fire.  
The killer sharpens knives in the  
Early morning.  
On a streetcorner  
He shows his son how.

It is the feast of killing sheep.  
Small boys with braziers of coal begin  
To char the heads.

Sometimes they roll them—the brittle  
Ash breaks off. Some wrap the entrails  
Around their arms

Or swing them like wet rope. The mute  
Black noses point Allah-wards. The red  
Wool forms carpet.  
The coals in the dirt  
Are white sheep eyes.

In the innermost courts the families  
Sit with the smell of pure flesh.  
The prayers settle

All night. Stars pass over the city  
All night, the rooftops are silent  
And the moon full.

Colors separate towards morning.  
Coals crumble in the new light.

1225 B.C.

There was sensible terror  
When the river turned rank.  
The ornamented fish  
And the long limbed birds  
Faltered and fell motionless  
In our nets.  
We could not drink the water  
For it spawned frogs  
And the night air  
Was full and loathsome  
With their sounds.  
The flies,  
Like vats of black dye  
Loosened into the sky,  
Goaded the goats and cattle  
Who ran wild  
In the wilting yellow fields.  
The dead stank while  
We sat inspecting our lives;  
Then all clean flesh  
Festered and we seemed  
Ourselves to be dying.  
Some men walked unharmed  
And said sticks would turn  
To snakes in their hands,  
But I never saw it.  
A great hail ruined the grain.  
Darkness came. The city  
Vibrated with laments;  
Parents ran into the streets  
With their heavy dead,  
Their dearest first-born sons.  
The days dawned expertly  
On the empty land  
And those still alive



Were greatly changed.  
The waters cleared and the wind  
Moved. But few knew  
What wretched schemes  
We had been so firmly caught in.

## PEOPLE FROM YOUR JAW

I know it's only what holds teeth and keeps  
the mouth from falling open stupidly  
but I've seen your jaw  
on other faces looking gritted  
and unnatural like that last day,  
like it was wired after a fall  
like Ann-Margret who ate liquefied pizza  
for 3 months until hers healed,  
that was in Las Vegas.

Some look like they ache  
like your jaw that last day  
like it had been used to beat people with,  
literally, as in two battles  
I remember offhand, Samson  
winging them right and left  
and Molly Seagrim laying them low,  
that was England and Israel  
which used to be Palestine;  
I still wear old coins we bought there  
you made them into something  
to hang on me.

What I see is not just your jawline  
but I x-ray in to the bone,  
white, shapely, thin,  
like you were that last day  
and I think I could carve it  
into a flute to accompany you  
when you play viola—  
it fits up tightly under your chin.  
I could play tree leaves,  
you could play pathos unless  
you preferred myth and pagan  
culture. After listening

I could put the flute away,  
the case slides into a breast pocket,  
and go into the street like that last day  
taking only what allows me to create  
people from your jaw, like from someone's rib,  
and to take small pleasure in it.



## LOCKET

A.H. may have remarried,  
might've died, or otherwise lost  
interest; her locket, on the other  
hand, survives—a little worn,  
but delicate as ever: gold  
booklet with a little heart inside  
10K sincere and pure.

Inside as well, two photos  
facing, each a print made  
from the same exposure. Sepia, one;  
the other black-and-white: they  
show within their crudely scissored  
ovals *him*, a he who's young  
and uniformed. U.S.? It's hard

to tell: the cap insignia's not  
clear; wide overcoat  
lapels conceal the rest. He smiles  
a Nordic smile that's known no  
war as yet; behind his head,  
part of a window frame appears  
to pierce his ear, spear-thick.

The locket, new antique, became  
my wife's; she's faithful, turns  
him out at once. Now helpless,  
evicted, he rests—dependent, shy—  
within my hand. I drop him finally  
into the darkness underneath my desk.  
I make and wear this locket in his name.

## SONGS FOR AN OLD WOMAN

1

She sits by the window  
knitting her fingers  
into wrinkles  
while another sun  
rolls its crazy eye  
over the trees.

2

From the next farmhouse  
she hears someone  
chopping wood,  
the thud of an ax  
ripping between her ears.

3

In the fields  
a horse and plow  
steer like a car  
without the right  
front tire.  
Smoke tunnels from  
the pickle factory  
in Croswell. A man  
yells and swings  
a whip at the  
horse.

4

All day  
the old woman imagines  
her husband is alive:  
carrying in pails of milk

from the barn. She sees  
her many children running  
and playing with the rusted  
two bottom plow, old slats  
of wood, the bones of a  
raccoon.

5

Before dusk,  
it starts to rain; the distant  
crumbling of thunder.  
The rotted wood beams of the cabin  
squeak as if they were hollow and  
infested with bats.

6

She sits in a chair,  
staring into the yellowed glass window  
and listens:  
this cutting, this plowing,  
that puts her to sleep, that wakes her up.



**THE TOAD WHO MOUNTS A HORSE  
BECOMES A PRINCE: NO KISS REQUIRED**

The toad who mounts a horse  
becomes a prince  
we are all improved  
on horseback above  
our squat countrymen  
infected by the flair  
of an equine neck  
the nostrils trumpeting  
like orchids in the movies  
the horses are beautiful  
and fan across the bright  
screen animals running  
on clouds dismounted  
riders become toads  
playing guitars giving up  
the old dream the princely  
clarity of moving through air  
on the polished indifference  
of hooves.

**CHILDHOOD DOCUMENTARY:  
TWO WEEKS IN NASHVILLE — 1955**

We built a golf course  
Across her neighborhood of lawns,  
And rolled through Tennessee  
In an old side-tracked dining car,  
A tete-a-tete over invisible wine  
On the latest Catholic outrage.  
We sat skootched down  
In the back seat at the drive-in,  
Just on the threshold  
Of the behavior we watched.  
We rinsed our mouths  
After every meal  
And slept head-to-head  
In the same room,  
Kissing each other  
On the mouth good night  
As her mother backed out  
And left us in darkness.

Fifteen years later  
We consummated our reunion  
On a throw-rug  
In the basement.  
She talked of whipped cream  
And knew some tricks  
While I took all I could  
In the name of quantity  
And a short Christmas leave.

Tucked in tight,  
We whispered at the ceiling for hours  
And when we were safe  
She would slide in over my pillow

And we'd lie pressed together,  
Wet, afraid, laughing,  
Caught without our coats  
In the first great storm.



## MAX

His still steady furrier's  
hands worry the crease  
he worked into page one,  
folded back as he  
reads. "Fifth time  
today," she says. "Reads  
the morning paper over  
and over and remembers  
nothing. Say hello, Max."

He looks up, smiles  
politely, nods back  
to his Daily News. Before  
him two strangers, great  
grandchildren he has  
never seen, dance  
and chatter. Hugging my  
tiny grandmother, I watch  
them hover too close, fear  
his mean streak might  
surface in one quick kick.

Her voice firm in his  
mind after seventy years,  
he shuffles after us in  
to the common room. "Four  
people here that I can  
talk with. The rest are  
disturbed." She drapes her  
mink across the glass-topped  
table. They pose, an arm  
around each child. "Max,  
smile at her. You're  
frightening the poor girl."

He fiddles with her coat  
lining, approves the material,  
flips the hem up, back  
down, up. "This coat.  
I made this for you,  
Rosie, remember?" He fingers  
the lining, collar, pockets,  
defines inch wide strips  
of pelt with thumb and forefinger.  
"We had cutters and fitters,  
a blocker, a stitcher, a finisher.  
This was some special  
thing, this was. A good  
coat like this, you could  
tell just from the lining . . . ."

"Alright, already, Max.  
They don't care about  
such things. Leave the coat  
alone." He is gone  
before she stops, nodding  
at me without recognition,  
smiling gently. He turns  
to my daughter, strokes  
her hair. "Nice boy."

## HOMETOWN BLUES

Everybody here is sturdy, proud —  
like boulders hauled to field's edge,  
or elms along the boulevards.  
Not old, they seem to be,  
even children — small construction crews  
hugging sidewalks and backyard swings.

Habit rules, and industry. The wind  
cries only when it's stopped.  
You stare toward bedroom windows, always dark,  
trying to imagine faded flowers on walls,  
photos gathered on dresser tops,  
kinds of sleep you've never known.

You've been away too long to feel more than  
the silent etiquette of questions never asked.  
You wouldn't want to live here,  
though you know they'd take you in —  
these are the ones who understand  
all forms of weather, even yours.



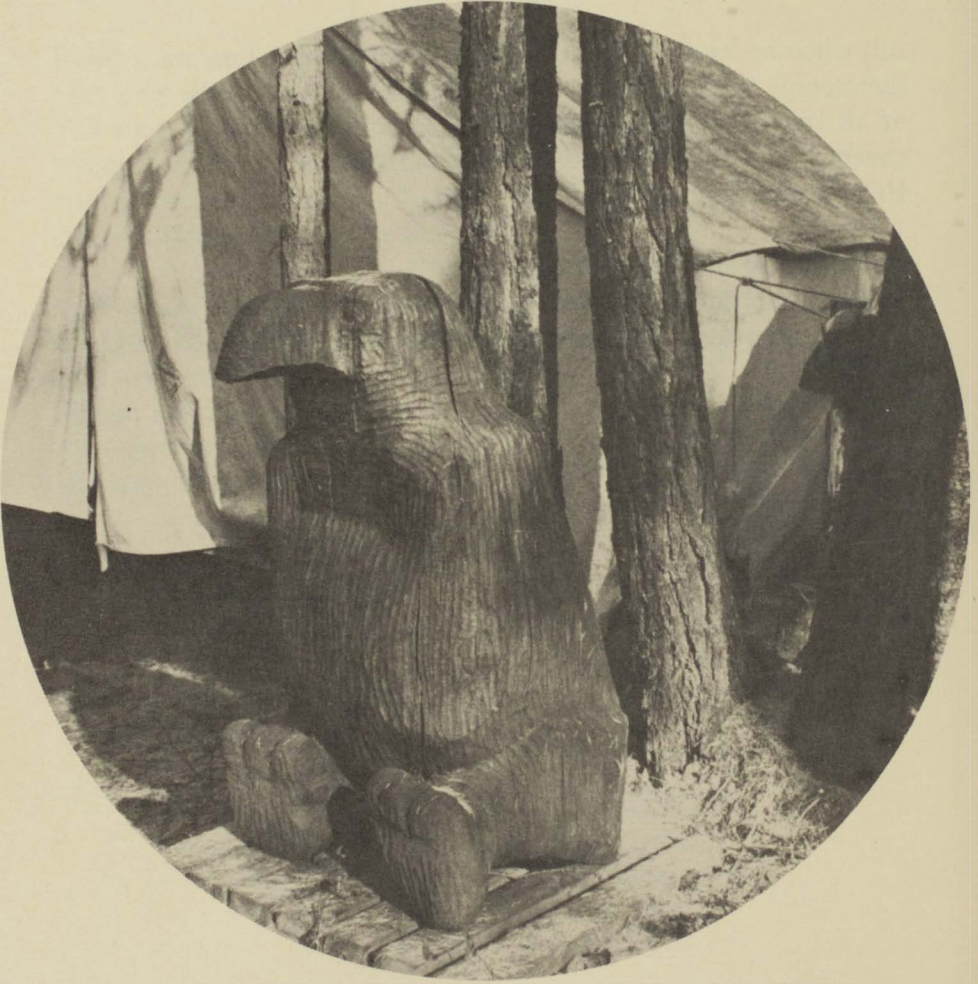
**POET, SEEKING CREDENTIALS, PULLS DARING  
DAYLIGHT ROBBERY OF SMALL TOWN  
IOWA BANK**

The teller said she knew right off  
he was a different type — the note  
he passed her was a tulip petal  
covered with some kind of “foreign script.”

But when he leaped on top of the potted plant,  
threatening to throttle her with his heron  
or his snake, she got the message — gave him  
nearly 30 bucks in cash and some blank checks.  
He bowed and autographed her wrist.

According to the late, late news reports  
he's still at large — last seen headed East  
pushing an orange Packard with Venezuelan plates.

REVIEWS



*A Fall In Mexico*

Anthony Ostroff

Doubleday & Co.

New York, \$4.95, Paper

*A Gypsy's History of the World*

Kim Robert Stafford

Copper Canyon Press

Port Townsend, Washington

\$3.50, Paper

The role and importance of "place" in a poet's work is much discussed these days. Seminars are held, and magazines devote entire issues to exploring the question. But where a poet lives is not half as important as how a poet uses (or does not use) place in his work.

Anthony Ostroff's *A Fall In Mexico* is set in a far place. Ostroff is a northwesterner (he lives in Portland), and the Mexico he finds is almost the direct opposite of home. It is hot, timeless, "waterless":

This is a place. Beer,  
a leaking toilet, a radio song.  
Men waste in chairs, dreaming wages,  
sweaty women, rooms, travel.  
A rusted wheel outside the door  
absorbs the glare. All day it's noon.  
(*"Traveling"*)

But what comes through in these carefully crafted poems is not just a sense of place, there is also a sense of the life found there. What comes through is a sense of life which is uneven at best, often grim, and which accepts that grimness as the simple order of things:

When you ask about the beggars  
those who do not beg  
shrug.  
They say: *Los probres*.

When you ask about the beggars  
they say, *Por que?*  
Why do you ask?

(*"Asking About The Beggars"*)



What Ostroff presents in this book is not a mere collection of discrete poems, but rather a book length sequence; each poem like another panel in a carefully ordered succession. If there is any fault in this technique, it is the feeling that some poems are almost fillers, placed merely to control the pacing of the sequence as a whole.

But weighed against the best pieces in this book, that's a small complaint. *A Fall In Mexico* is full of fine individual poems, "In Puerto Vallarta," "Iguanas," and "Yucatan" among others. Equally as satisfying are the prose sections, under the general title "Notebook." "At San Blas, the Jungle River Trip" is one of the best of these. Quoted here are two sections, one from near the beginning, and the other from near the end:

Juan pulls the cord. The motor starts at once. His friend eases us away from the bank. We head upstream. My wife's hands, clutching the gunwales on either side of her, are white. Our small son — he is six — sits very straight. He will not tip the boat. I am thinking this is not quite a dream, but it is not quite real either. We have arrived in an automobile, from a paved, modern highway. We are only three days' drive from our destination, the border, the United States, sanitation, safety, pure food and drugs, all the machineries of convenience and distant war. And here we enter the jungle.

Yet somewhere only an hour from here, our boatman swears, the river springs full-size from the mountain-side, wells up in a great crystal shock and fills a pool so wide it shows the sky. In the pool's cool transparencies huge fish, like jeweled kings, fare in stately leisure forth and back, white, black, lavender, unblinking and big-eyed. They are the spirits of all quest. One hour more, he says, across this dark, sliding face to that — which must be what but Death's most beautiful face?

"The Bougainvillaea," the final poem in the sequence, is almost the book itself, in miniature. At 165 lines, it is at once a recasting and a summing up:

These Mexicos that live for us  
in flickerings of lost hope,  
neither unreal nor real, steep  
as our first carrion-filled ravine,  
high as the condor's flight, are seen  
from a kind of sleep. They are the truths we guess.

Richard Eberhart, in what is meant as a laudatory comment, calls *A Fall In Mexico* "in effect a poetic tour guide to ancient Mexico." Ostroff's concerns are far more important than that. His intent, I

think, is to show us how we look at the world, by giving us both the world and the looking. *A Fall In Mexico* does what all changes in locale are meant to do. It offers new windows on a world that is old everywhere, so that in that context (which is both new and not new) we might feel we have discovered something genuine about that world and our particular places in it.

On the surface, almost everything about Kim Stafford's book is in contrast of Ostroff's; everything but the quality. *A Gypsy's History of the World* is not a sequence in the way Ostroff's is, nor is it so consistently concerned with a particular locale. Stafford too is a northwesterner, and while some poems depend on particular places ("Orchas Island," for instance), Stafford's place is more likely to be wherever he finds himself:

A dream flips me into the daylight.  
I pry my way back:  
a door opens, I enter, never  
escape; the jailor sings by morning  
duets through the bars with me.  
I wake and out my window  
by dawn a blackbird sings and  
listens, sings and listens.

("Duets")

Yet, in spite of their clear differences, these books are not that far apart. If Ostroff's book is, in several different ways, a sort of travel diary in a foreign country, then *Gypsy's History* is a diary in time, with individual moments and perceptions caught whole and forever.

For the most part, Stafford's voice is quiet, his ear faultless, rhythms unforced. It is a deceptive quiet, for there are stunning effects, absolutely accurate descriptions:

God's misspent dime climbs slowly  
from its dark pocket in the hills.  
An owl briefly knits song to silence,  
the measured voice, the inner face  
speaking breath to bone.

Inside, I am washing the dishes.  
The power fails, lights flutter dark.  
The plate I hold is all, single  
link to the world, wet, smooth,  
warm.

I know it like the moon,



white, round mask of light  
eclipsed, and now there is only this,  
the plate, my hand, the clock, the owl,  
and I caress it, as a blind man  
the mirror.

("The Moon")

Perhaps it is Stafford's choice of subjects, or the measured cadence of his lines; whatever the reason, these poems seem to carry an almost fundamental message: slow down, watch and listen.

For me, the best poems in this book are the small (and not so small) dramas, and what comes from them in poems like "The Moon," "Halfway Home," "Marriage," and "Inside the Fence." They work something like knotholes in a construction barricade — we look in, curious and happily amazed.

*Lex Runciman*

*Coming Through Slaughter*

Michael Ondaatje

House of Anansi Press Ltd.\*

Toronto, Canada

4.95 paper

In the Pound tradition of history as a series of fragments woven by highly lyrical prose and poetry, Ondaatje explores the inner thoughts and emotions of jazz pioneer Buddy Bolden. The obsessive nature of Bolden's creative energy produces a "landscape of suicide," an inevitability of loss. Bolden's peripheral encounters with the prostitutes of New Orleans, his two extended love affairs, a mysterious friendship with Bellocq, the photographer of whores, and those he groomed at his barber shop, are the backdrops for Bolden's unsettled life.

With almost nothing important outside his music, Bolden attempts to contribute a unique possibility to jazz. He talks about his forerunners:

My fathers were those who put their bodies over barbed wire.  
For me. To slide over into the region of hell. Through their  
sacrifice they seduced me into the game. They showed me their



autographed pictures and told me about their women and they told me even bigger names all over the country. My fathers failing. Dead before they hit the wire.

Continuity is absent from everyone's life. Reaching out to the world often becomes a self-destructive gesture. As in Bolden's return to Nora, his wife, after two years away from music and New Orleans, there is little peace in his homecoming.

Not enough blankets here . . . Found an old hunting jacket. I sleep against its cloth full of hunter's sweat . . . I went to sleep as soon as I arrived and am awake now after midnight. Scratch of suicide at the side of my brain.

But Bolden hates stasis, as other men "hate to see themselves change." This provides an impetus for his music. He continually seeks new limits for his music, as well as the strained relationships with those who loved him.

In a final and obsessive attempt to mirror music to the rhythms of his world, Bolden blows his cornet to the flesh-dance of a woman taunting and testing his music.

Notes more often now. She hitting each note with her body before it is even out so I know what I do through her. God this is what I wanted to play for, if no one else I always guessed there would be this, this mirror somewhere.

It is this audience, this woman, who gives Boddy Bolden the energy, the freedom to blow until blood comes, his mouth frozen to the cornet.

Willy Cornesh catching him as he fell outward, covering him, seeing the red on the white shirt thinking it is torn and the red undershirt is showing and then lifting the horn sees the blood spill out from it as he finally lifts the metal from the hard kiss of the mouth.

It is energy Bolden needs, enough energy to go insane and finally gain peace and freedom from the world. If nothing else, the clarity of

Bolden's inevitable destruction gives us the risks of the creative process.

*\*Coming Through Slaughter* is also available in America from the "Asphodel Book Shop," 17192 Ravenna Rd., Burton, Ohio, 44021.

*Terry Nathan*

*Man In A Rowboat*

Tom Rea

Copper Canyon Press

Port Townsend, Washington 1977

\$2.50, paper

Dear Rick: I'm in Browning, travelling light.  
The stars are closer here, nearer to all things,  
even my backpack. Rick, we don't need much:  
One raincoat, an extra shirt (L.L. Bean), a can  
of smoked salmon and Tom Rea's book. You should  
read it, friend, the poems are bright as a drum.  
Each one unfolds quiet and quickly, the great way  
of the photo album on Sunday evenings. But see,  
these snapshots aren't your regular fishing trips,  
these here poems catch a lost strange land. Take  
the opening *Poem*: "There were/ no words yet." Or  
*High Plains, Wyoming*: "But there was a time/ you  
could float to the ocean in a month,/ just drift,  
no portages, no falls." Or even *The Climber Takes  
A Breather*. There's the man in the strange awkward  
land, the one who (isn't) "bred for ledges." See,  
even the title poem starts "There was a lake once,"  
and flows on to be a love poem to the joy of living  
in the awesomeness. Wordsworth, right? No. Not rightly.  
More Uncle Ezra and Mr. Kawabata: these poems are elegies  
to Wildtime, to pure and beautiful Mystery. Take the hard  
poem *The Wolf* or the sad sad *Bear*. These strong or  
subtle violences toward the very wildness within us  
must eventually cause our own imprisonment. "His cousin  
is dying in the Denver zoo/ one cage down from the pool  
where seals/ try anything for fun." See, we are capable,



friend, of the awful killing of a pure mystery. This book of poems knows it, and the poet is showing us. Rick: these poems reflect the hardshipped world, as when Conrad Aiken said: “. . . to be the ambassador of all you are to all that is not you.” Here is that tension and fear, behind Tom’s deceptive frivolity. Rick, here in Browning I have eaten the salmon and loved this book. It is raining now, snow later. I won’t pull the raincoat out just yet. Love, Lee.

Lee Bassett

*Making It Simple*

David McElroy

Ecco Press, 1975

New York, New York

\$2.95, paper

*Snow Country*

Robert Hedin

Copper Canyon Press, 1975

Port Townsend, Washington

\$3.00, paper

Let’s say it’s *weather* that connects these two poets, and in particular, the way weather — through its instruments of wind and snow — manages to confound what was formerly sure. Both men spent a great deal of time in Alaska, so it shouldn’t be surprising that the landscape, its changing face, forms such a central concern — even when the locations of some poems lie in a more temperate zone. Each writer’s response, however, is utterly individual: so much so, in fact, that leafing through the books, noting the differences in tone, manner of statement, you’d swear that if these two ever met they wouldn’t get along. Maybe start arguing, even. But don’t be too hasty. While McElroy seems to use the extremes of weather and circumstance toward an ongoing redefinition of self, and while Hedin uses the same, it seems, to arrive at a more proper stance with regard to *what’s out there*, you must remember that these two notions are not that far apart. Both concede — *surrender*, if that’s your word — to the fact



that we are alone, mortal, and the only halfway reliable points of reference when everything else is being blown away, or losing its contours in snow. Sharpening becomes vital to both.

*Making It Simple* opens with both a genesis and a death, the spawning of eelpout in a northern Minnesota river. It doesn't take long to get a sense of this as an image of the poet's own struggle for identity. In this poem, "Females plant gravel/ with clouds. Flocks of males boil in a kiss/ and make a hundred million chances work." The violence of this dynamism continues through the book's four sections, each of which in some way points to a stage of physical or psychological death and maturation. It is as if there is never enough time for rest. The impulse is to take each scene as a test of the self-definition he has arrived at: "Doors are open/ as if to ask, Are you a breeze?" And elsewhere:

We will be slow to call this wisdom:  
the third shepherd talking to zero,  
the messenger who brought us forty-one  
kinds of failure last year still surviving,  
Tornado Frank pivoting over Kansas  
on its cock, the weather in Qomox,  
the writer who makes happen  
as little as possible, the clouds  
compared to crumbs on blue china,  
and you, with no more hallelujah  
than a glass of juice, not noticing  
me not saying anymore I love you.

("One for Your Hills and Sea")

Nothing much is sure. The more rapid the changes, the tougher McElroy seems to get — embracing what is not static, but with a voice stronger in defense against it:

I thought I'd made it.  
I went south, doubled back  
in snow, walked backward  
in snow, dissolved my trail  
south again through water.  
In soft shoes I lost my smell  
in Seattle and New York, New York.  
It didn't work.

("Molt of the Winter Soul")

As the lines that follow these suggest, the speaker is being made a continual orphan by circumstances which negate the former base of

his response to the world. There are always new bearings to be found, and the glib ones will not do: "So when the good girl on the panel for peace implied/ your copter was evil, I felt like hooky." The fact is, McElroy's poems are revolts *against* glibness, against arriving at some self-definition unable to be modified or challenged. Nest warmth won't do. The obsession is with movement, even in the latter poems that deal with maturity, those in the last section — "Approaching Some Ocean". There is no arrival there: "These tracks curve into the earth, vanish to a point/ you're walking to, the next rock after crust."

Perhaps the poet's concession to the violence of change explains why the Alaskan landscape shows up so much in his poems. A good many of them, maybe half, are located elsewhere, yet the references appear nevertheless. Perhaps it's that backdrop, and the emotional content coincident with it, that lends his poems so much of their force —as here, in "Up the Alcan":

I open Sister Mary Gilbert's  
book across the horn  
on the wheel. On the one hand  
I steer. On the other, I push  
the words flat against the page  
so they won't bounce off  
across the tundra with the bears.  
This poem's about the undertow.

This road was built for war.  
Curves, loops and doodles  
on a flat plateau made convoys  
safer from strafing that never  
happened here. The chrome ram  
on the hood sweeps the horizon  
in a steep turn. I'm a hero  
on the prow.

Without warning the road  
coils in a pile behind a tree.  
Caught in the vortex,  
both hands on the wheel,  
the words fall down, break,  
and the page comes tumbling after.  
A coyote whips by.  
One quick look:  
the zeros in his eyes.



Like the first book, *Snow Country* opens on a form of death, in this case the exhaustion of psychological means "at the end of the open road." Like McElroy, Hedin uses the landscape as a starting point for self-inventory, and here — where the landscape disappears — there is nothing left but the two sorts of responses the self makes to a scene devoid of any shape or distinction. The speaker addresses Louis Simpson:

before us still lies the darkness.  
in it we think  
we see trees, giant sequoias  
that break around an open marsh,  
and are compelled to give them greer  
to give them sway  
a hard mossy bark,  
rain dripping from the leaves.

Listen. a bullfrog's call.  
smell the moist calm in the air.

We wait for the moon  
for the song of a white bird

Any backdrop  
of light.  
("End")

There is active imagination working here, and also that other sort of response, passive, implied by the listening. The individual mind asserts, creating in a photo "the voices of miners fading north,/ The bray of animals, the echoes/ Of stones piling up to stake a claim." And it chooses *no* assertion, as when it concedes that the wind "is always taking/ You down/ In its arms,/ And making you heavy/ With its words." When these two impulses are harmonized, when the self is asserted and presented at the same time as only a small part — probably insignificant — of an entire whole, the tension created is dramatic. Here, in full, is the title poem:

Up on Verstovia the snow country is silent tonight.  
I can see it from our window,  
A white sea whose tide flattens over the darkness.  
This is where the animals must go—  
The old foxes, the bears too slow to catch  
The fall run of salmon, even the salmon themselves—



All brought together in the snow country of Verstovia.  
 This must be where the ravens turn to geese,  
 The weasels to wolves, where the rabbits turn to owls.  
 I wonder if birds even nest on the floating sea,  
 What hunters have forgotten their trails and sunk out of sight.  
 I wonder if the snow country is green underneath,  
 If there are forests and paths  
 And cabins with wood-burning stoves.  
 Or does it move down silently gyrating forever,  
 Glistening with the bones of animals and trappers,  
 Eggs that are cold and turning to stones.  
 I wonder if I should turn, tap and even wake you.

("The Snow Country")

This approximation of balance, this juggling of impulses goes on throughout the book. Perhaps because the speaker is preoccupied not only with himself, but also with himself-in-the-world, these poems come off quieter than those of the first selection. And no criticism is implied for either in saying this. The purposes of both are different enough to be taken on their own merits.

Where McElroy's poems show a tendency toward an abundance of forms, and the strengthening of personality in the face of such profusion, the subjects in Hedin's tend toward being "whited-out":

Here on this ridge all is so white  
 It all seems dark.  
 The only color left is my wife,  
 and soon she too will fade.

\* \* \*

I hear the bushes in the ditch  
 Crouch and paw at the white.  
 The stones under my feet  
 Are struggling to rise into swans.  
 Far off I hear the strike of a match.  
 And I see my wife's hand open  
 Stroking a growing white flame.

McElroy confronts his scenes with a voice, Hedin with a desire for clarity—even if it means his voice must lose out to the wind's, even if his last and only friends are "A cricket who's run out of songs,/ A jagged piece of rock/ Termed muse."

Where both these poets meet is in their knowledge of *their moving*. They know it is always snowing, wherever they are — that any minute

now the road they thought before them may be lost in an overlay of white. Their direction becomes wisely tentative. Lucky for us, they write about the human response to such bare fact, not just the poetic response. I lied to you earlier: these two would probably not even think of arguing. Hedin's poem, "Transcanadian," may very well speak for the both of them, showing us the more important thing on their minds:

At this speed, my friend, our origins are groundless.  
We are nearing the eve of a great festival,  
The festival of wind.  
Already you can see this road weakening.  
Soon it will breathe  
And lift away to dry its feathers in the air.  
On both sides the fields of rape seed and sunflowers  
Are revolting against their rows.  
Soon they will scatter widely like pheasants.  
Now is the time, friend, to test our souls.  
We must let them forage for themselves,  
But first — unbuckle your skin.  
It is out here, in the darkness  
Between two shimmering cities,  
That we have, perhaps for the last time, chance  
Neither to be shut nor open,  
But to let our souls speak and carry our bodies like capes.

*Rick Robbins*

*Making It Simple* is still available in bookstores and by order from the publisher. *Snow Country* is out of print, but copies are still available from Spring Church Book Company, Box 127, Spring Church, Pennsylvania.





## CONTRIBUTORS

LEE BASSETT teaches this year with Montana's Poetry-in-the-Schools program.

He's had poems in several magazines, but prefers the newspapers to anything else.

WENDY BISHOP lives in Davis, California and is completing a book-length collection of poems.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC edits *The Greenfield Review*. A book of new poems, *Entering Onondaga*, is just out from Cold Mountain Press.

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY has poems forthcoming in *Pebble*, *The Chowder Review*, and *Cafeteria*. He teaches in the poetry-in-the-schools program in Anaheim, California.

SYLVIA CLARK is currently a poet-in-residence with the Gray Panthers of Seattle, doing writing projects with older people.

DOROTHY COX lives in Europe.

MADELINE DEFREES is enjoying a richly deserved sabbatical this year from the University of Montana.

VICTOR M. DEPTA teaches at the University of Tennessee. He's had two collections of poems published, *The Creek* (Ohio Univ. Press) and *The House* (New Rivers).

JOHN DITSKY teaches at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada. He's published poems nearly everywhere.

JOHN DUFFIELD is on the Economics faculty at the University of Montana.

JON EASTMAN spends an awful lot of time in the darkroom these days.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH is in Austin, Texas now. His most recent collection, *Comings Back*, is available from Doubleday.

SAMUEL GREEN edits Jawbone Press and works in Washington's Poetry-in-the-Schools program.

SAM HAMILL is co-publisher at Copper Canyon Press. A chapbook, *Living Light*, is due out from Jawbone Press. Bookstore Press will publish a full collection of his work this spring, called *The Book of Elegiac Geography*.

ROBERT HEDIN was poet-in-residence at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, last year. He is currently living in France. His first book, *Snow Country*, was published by Copper Canyon Press, and is reviewed in this issue.

ERNEST HEKKANEN lives in Coquitlam, B.C., where he is at work on a novel. He has had stories published in *Prism International*, *Event*, and *The Carolina Quarterly*.

LEWIS B. HORNE teaches at the University of Saskatchewan, and has published in a number of places. One of his stories was reprinted in *Best American Short Stories of 1974*.

TIM HUNT writes poems and criticism. He teaches in the Freshman Honors program at the University of Delaware.

RICH IVES is a former editor of this magazine. He works in the University Library now, and publishes in places like *Poetry Northwest*, *Graham House Review*, and *The Malahat Review*.

DAVID JAMES is working on his M.A. at Central Michigan University, teaching a little, drinking a lot, and soon-to-be-married.

GREG LEICHNER is a carpenter living in Missoula.

D. S. LONG runs The Taylor's Mistake Press out of Christchurch, New Zealand.

MATTHEW MCKAY is a psychiatric social worker in San Francisco. He's had poems published in a variety of places, and works on *Medusa*.

JOAN MICHELSON moved to England in 1970. She's a full-time lecturer at Wolverhampton Polytechnic — over there.

ALBERT FRANK MORITZ co-translated *Children of the Quadrilateral: Selected Poems of Benjâmin Peret*, available from the Bitter Oleander Press, Syracuse, New York.

TERRY NATHAN is in the MFA program here in Missoula. He had work appear in *CutBank 8* and a recent *Uzzano*.

BEA OPENGART just pulled into town from Tucson, Arizona, to work toward her degree in creative writing. She has the thankless job of coordinating the Sunday night readings — and we thank her for that.

ROBERT SIMS REID lives and works in Missoula. He received his MFA from here last spring.

SHERRY RIND has a chapbook forthcoming from Succor Press. She works with the Arts-and-the-Aging team in Seattle.

FLOYD SKLOOT lives in Olympia, Washington and is associate editor of *The Chowder Review*.

BRUCE SMITH raises Angus on a farm in Deposit, New York, and co-edits the *Graham House Review*.

MEREDITH STEINBACH is anthologized in *The Pushcart Prize #2: Best of the Small Presses*. Her work here is a section from a novel, tentatively entitled *Zara Montgomery*.

DAVID SWANGER had a poem in our first issue, and more recently has seen work appear in *Epoch*, *The Malahat Review*, and *New Letters*.

NANCY TAKACS received her MFA from the University of Iowa and teaches now at Youngstown State University.

VICTOR TRELA WNY used to edit *Portland Review*, and is now working on his MFA degree at Arizona.

JIM TRIFILIO spent last summer doing research in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Yukon and the Mackenzie River delta. He's had poems in *New Letters* and *Road Apple Review*, among others.

MARK VINZ teaches at Moorhead State University in Minnesota, and is the editor of *Dacotah Territory*. Four chapbook collections of his poems have been published, including two in 1977: *Red River Blues* and *Songs for A Hometown Boy*.

PETER WILD's latest books are *Cochise* (1973), *The Cloning* (1974), and *Chihuahua* (1976), all from Doubleday.

CHRISTINE ZAWADIWSKY won a 1976 NEA grant for poetry. Her book of prose-poems, *The World At Large*, is forthcoming from The Bieler Press.

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- Beloit Poetry Journal* (Summer and Fall 1977), Robert H. Glauber, David M. and Marion Kingston Stocking, eds., Box 2, Beloit, Wisconsin 53511. \$1/issue.
- Bits* (#6), Dennis Dooley, et al, eds., Dept. of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 44106. No price listed.
- Cafeteria* (#8), Gordon Preston, ed., and Rick Robbins, straw boss, P.O. Box 4104, Modesto, California 95352.
- Chariton Review* (Spring and Fall 1977), Jim Barnes and Andrew Grossbardt, eds., Division of Language and Literature, Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville, Missouri 63501. \$2.00.
- The Chowder Review* (#8), Ron Slate, ed., 2858 Kingston Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53712. \$1.75/issue.
- Cornfield Review* (#s 1 & 2), David Citino, ed., Dept. of English, Ohio State Univ., Marion, Ohio 43302.
- Dacotah Territory* (#s 13 & 14), Mark Vinz, ed., Moorhead State University, Moorhead, Minnesota 56560. \$1.50/issue.
- December* (Vol. 18, #s 2 & 3), Curt Johnson, ed., 4343 N. Clarendon, Chicago, Illinois 60613.
- Graham House Review* (#2), Peter Balakian and Bruce Smith, eds., P.O. Box 489, Englewood, New Jersey 07631. \$2.50/year.
- Greenfield Review* (Vol. 5, #s 3 & 4), Joesph Bruchac, ed., Greenfield Center, New York 12833. \$2.00/issue.
- Grilled Flowers* (Spring/Summer and Final Issue 1977), Frank Graziano, ed., University of Arizona Poetry Center, 1086 Highland Ave., Tucson, Arizona 85719.
- kayak* (#s 45 & 46), George Hitchcock, ed., 325 Ocean View Ave., Santa Cruz, California 95062. \$4.00/4 issues.
- Kudzu* (July 1977), Jim Peterson, ed., Box 865, Cayce, South Carolina 29033. \$4.00/year.
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- Mr. Cogito* (Vol. 3, #3), Robert A. Davies and John Gogol, eds., Box 627, Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon 97116. \$1/issue.
- Northwest Review* (XVI-3), Michael Strelow, ed., 369 PLC, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97405. \$2.00/issue.
- Pebble/Seven Poets* (#16), Greg Kuzma, ed., 118 Boswell, Crete, Nebraska 68333. \$8.00/ssues.
- Pequod* (Vol. 2, #s 1 & 2), David Paradis and Mark Rudman, eds., Box 491, Forest Knolls, California 94933. \$2.00/issue.
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- Porch* (#s 1 & 2), James Cervantes, ed., 1422 37th Ave., Seattle, Washington 98122. \$2.00/issue.
- Quarterly West* (#s 3 & 4), Andrew Grossbardt, ed., 312 Olpin Union, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. \$1.50/issue.



- Siskyou Review* (#1), Patty Brooke, et al, eds., College of the Siskyou, Weed, California 96094. \$1.50/issue.
- The Slackwater Review* (Spring/Summer 1977), M. K. Brown, ed., Art Center, Lewis-Clark Campus, Lewiston, Idaho 83501. \$4.00/year.
- Sou'wester* (Vol. 5, #2), Lloyd Kropp, et al, eds., Dept. of English, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois 62025. \$1.50/issue.
- Stand* (Vol. 18, #3), Jon Silkin, et al, eds., c/o Robert Ober, 59 Clarendon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116. \$1.25/issue.
- Uzzano* (#4), Robert Schuler, ed., Shimer College, Mount Carroll, Illinois 61053. \$2.25/issue.
- Western Humanities Review* (Vol. 31, #s 2 & 3), Jack Garlington, ed., Dept. of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. \$2.00/issue.
- The Westigan Review* (Vol. 3, #3), Don Stap, ed., Dept. of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84112. \$6.00/4 issues.

#### BOOKS RECEIVED

- A Fall in Mexico*, Anthony Ostroff, poems, Doubleday, \$4.95.
- A Gypsy's History of the World*, Kim Robert Stafford, poems, Copper Canyon, \$3.50.
- A Note for the Flowers I Didn't Send*, James Paulson, poems, Poetry Texas, no price listed.
- A Vegetable Emergency*, Maxine Chernoff, poems and prose, Beyond Baroque.
- Bike Run*, Peter Sears, poems, Raindust Press, \$1.00.
- The Calling Across Forever*, Sam Hamill, Copper Canyon, \$4.00.
- Coot and Other Characters*, William Pitt Root, poems, Confluence Press, \$3.25.
- Destiny News*, Robert Fox, stories, December Press, \$4.00.
- The Distance, New and Selected Poems 1928-1977*, Norman Macleod, poems, Pembroke Press, \$3.00.
- 15 Predestination Weather Reports*, Curtis Lyle, poems, Beyond Baroque.
- From Desire to Desire*, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, poems, Doubleday, \$2.50.
- The Great American Belly Dance*, Daniela Gioseffi, novel, Doubleday, \$6.95, hardbound.
- How the Sow Became a Goddess*, Jim Heynen, poems, Confluence Press, \$2.50.
- In a Dusty Light*, John Haines, poems, Graywolf Press, \$5.00, letterpress.
- Lost Highway*, Warren Woessner, poems, Poetry Texas, no price listed.
- The Man in the Green Chair*, Charles Edward Eaton, poems, Barnes, \$7.95, hardbound.
- Mestiza*, Marina Rivera, poems, Grilled Flowers Special Issues, \$3.50.
- The Morning Light*, Curt Johnson, novel, Carpenter Press, \$5.00.
- Nebraska—A Poem*, Greg Kuzma, Best Cellar Press, no price listed.
- Pisces*, Tom Eagle, prose, Anabasis, \$4.00.
- Red River Blues*, Mark Vinz, poems, Poetry Texas, no price listed.
- 6 Poems*, Christopher Buckley, poems, Calavera Press, no price listed.
- Silence as a Method of Birth Control*, James Hepworth, poems, Confluence Press, \$2.50.
- The Silver Swan*, Kenneth Rexroth, poems, Copper Canyon, \$3.00.
- Snow Country* Robert Hedin, poems, Copper Canyon, \$3.00.
- Space Diary*, Dan McCarroll, poems, Beyond Baroque.



*Track Made Good*, Nicholas Ranson, poems, Bits Press, no price listed.

*12 Poems*, Jean Follain, Mary Feeney, translations, Grilled Flowers International Editions, \$3.00.

*Well, You Needn't*, Dave Etter, poems, Raindust Press, \$1.00.

*Work Lights*, David Young, prose poems, Cleveland State University Poetry Center, \$2.95.

*The Zimmer Poems*, Paul Zimmer, poems, Dryad Press, \$3.00.

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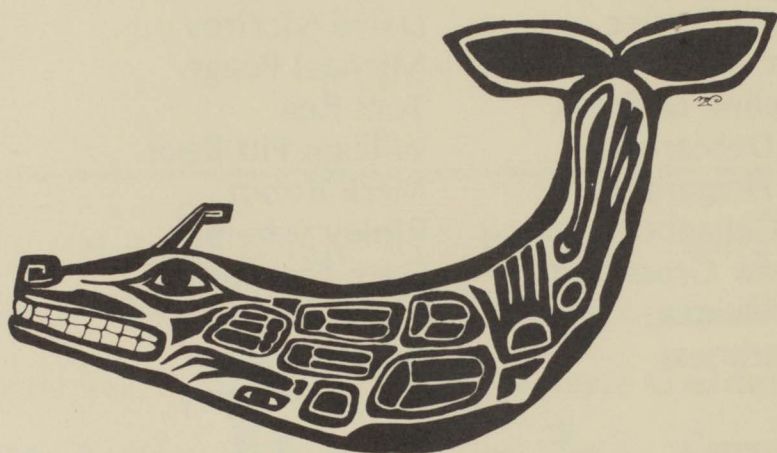
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